

PIERRE VINTON

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SUPERFLUOUS HUSBAND

EDWARD C. VENABLE

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**THE ADVENTURES
OF A SUPERFLUOUS HUSBAND**

BY

EDWARD C. VENABLE

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THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED TO

C. P. B.

THE HEADMASTER OF DE LANCEY SCHOOL
BY
A SORT OF PUPIL

2138769

BOOK I



T

WHAT a vast difference there is between an empty teacup and an emptied teacup. To have no longer any place in the Tray of Things, to be a little soiled by use, and, with a little of the sweetness of the Past in the depths of you, to belong only to the Out-of-the-Way, is, as I see it, to be an emptied teacup. And I can think of nothing else I so closely resemble at this hour.

When Marcella first spoke of divorce she referred, I remember, to "fetters." It is curious that the same circumstance should make me think of teacups. It is probably another instance of the incompatibility between Marcella and me, which, they say, is the cause of the whole matter. Of course, we must be incompatible. The fact that we spent two years and a great deal of money getting rid of each other proves that. We could scarcely give further proof, I think, unless we committed murder. We did not resort to any extreme,

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however. We simply called the attention of the Law of the Land to our incompatibility and asked for a remedy.

In fact, we have been congratulated on our behavior. At least, I have; and I suppose Marcella has also. One person described the divorce as "refined." I asked Lilly Axson what a refined divorce was. She explained it as meaning that "nothing horrid" had been divulged. "You were tired of Marcella, and she was tired of you, and that was all there was to it," explained Lilly.

I am afraid there isn't even that much to it. I am not at all sure that I am tired of Marcella. That Marcella was tired of me is indisputable, and, of course, I did not try to prove to her that she was not. She wrote me a letter when I did not oppose her suit and thanked me. She apparently thought I had acted like a gentleman. Every one else seems to think it, too. Indeed, the only person who is not satisfied completely with the whole affair is myself. I, however, believe that I was not tired of Marcella. It is this fact alone that makes me say that my marriage was a failure. We were certainly happy for three years, only mildly discontented for two; then we separated, and now we are divorced. From the point of view of Marcella who is satisfied

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with the divorce, the marriage should be called a tremendous success. It is only from my point of view that it can be called a failure.

I cannot even describe my own condition as miserable. Perhaps I should say I am profoundly bored. Matrimony is really an absorbing occupation. The office required a great deal of attention, for Marcella could spend more money innocently than any man who has ever lived. In extenuation, if it is a fault in a pretty woman to spend money, I can say I have never seen her badly dressed—not even when she had measles. But I have largely given up the office. I have enough money for my own use without its assistance. More than enough, perhaps, for I haven't Marcella's gift for spending money innocently. Besides the office I had innumerable other conjugal duties more directly connected with Marcella, taking her where she wanted to be seen with a husband and keeping her from places where she should not be seen at all. Altogether, running Marcella required an immense amount of thought and energy; it is mortifying to think how much, now when it has all proved useless.

That is always the end of any rational researches I make into the matter—that the marriage was a failure,

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that I am an emptied teacup, and that Marcella will probably marry somebody else. I invariably issue from the maze at that exit, but I can never find the beginning of the path—I mean, the cause of the failure. Even the true half of Lilly Axson's statement, that Marcella was tired of me, so utterly fatigued that she preferred kicking up all this row to going on living with me, is only an effect. But Mrs. Axson refused to go any deeper. She said she wasn't a "Dope Doctor," which is her rather expressive way of stating her dislike of psychology.

I had rather hoped the Reverend Bertrand Wither-spoon would go deeper. He married us and wrote each of us a letter of condolence when the decree was published. That was a little more discerning than most people, at any rate, although my letter was a very guarded admission of the existence of any cause for itself. Still, he evidently did not regard the divorce as a successful coup, accomplished in a genteel manner. I went to see him and asked him the question I had asked Mrs. Axson. He said our marriage had lacked spirituality.

"Your pleasure, your aims, your ambitions," he said, "what were they? Purely material, you admit of

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your own accord. Can such pleasure, such ambitions, my dear friend, ever truly form a band of union between two souls? Do they cultivate the qualities that make for union, unselfishness, broad-mindedness, idealism? Do they not, on the contrary, cultivate the opposite qualities—selfishness, pettiness, materialism—the qualities of discord and strife?"

The rectory of Saint Stephen's is the gloomiest house in America. The architecture is Gothic, to match the church, and the windows are slits, through which a man-at-arms might, if he were a good shot, have discharged a crossbow five hundred years ago in another hemisphere. The Reverend Bertrand Witherspoon, with his long black coat, his heavy gold cross, and his neatly trimmed "side burns," was impressive in the high, gloomy, narrow room of fine acoustic properties. It occurred to me that he had done what the window's shape suggested, shot at me with a weapon of another era and another hemisphere. I was a little stunned by the discharge, still I felt that he wasn't quite fair to either of us. It was greatly to my personal advantage to keep Marcella from leaving me, as I've shown, and it was equally to Marcella's similar advantage to stay with me because I am rich and Marcella hasn't a

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penny in the world and refuses alimony. But I didn't reveal these facts to the Reverend Bertrand. I felt that he would only look over the arsenal and hit me with a missile of a slightly different date.

"I greatly appreciate your coming to me," he said as I rose from the mediæval chair and took my hat from the refectory table of a fifteenth-century monastery. "It is the highest privilege of my order to bring assistance in the daily ordering of private life."

I thanked him. After all, he may truly believe that he has brought "assistance."

A few blocks above Saint Stephen's I met Mrs. Axson, who drove me up-town. Even Mrs. Axson's men friends admit that she is modern. After Saint Stephen's rectory she seemed prophetic. I told her where I had been.

"And what did he tell you?" asked Mrs. Axson.

"He divided two thousand syllables by five hundred words," I answered.

"And what's the dividend?"

"That I am a narrow-minded, selfish materialist."

"Poor Marcella!" sighed Mrs. Axson.

"But Marcella is just as bad," I added.

This silenced Mrs. Axson. I judged by the expres-

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sion of her face that she was thinking of Father Witherspoon.

"It isn't entirely his fault," I suggested. "It's partly the architecture."

"You mean the Church?" she said.

"I don't," I disclaimed. I did not. I rent a pew at Saint Stephen's.

She dropped me at the corner of my side street.

"Who are you going to ask now?" she said, leaning in the window of the car and surveying me with an indulgent smile. She often does this. I have heard her express the opinion that I am "half cracked."

"I think I shall go to Mrs. Malory." I had not thought of Mrs. Malory, but I felt compelled to deserve the indulgent smile.

"I know exactly what she will tell you," answered Mrs. Axson.

"What?" I asked.

"That you ought to have had a baby."

As a matter of fact, that is exactly what Mrs. Malory did tell me. I was rather surprised at her frankness, but I have noticed that there is nothing the average mother is so immodest about as motherhood. (I have heard them talk to Marcella until her face burned.

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She was very shy in such matters.) And Mrs. Malory is an average mother. She has three children, who come in for cakes at tea and make curtsies to everybody in the room. When they had come and curtsied and gone and she and I were alone I asked Mrs. Malory what I had asked Father Witherspoon and Mrs. Axson.

“Mrs. Malory,” I said bluntly, “do you think that I am capable of making any woman happy?”

She looked at me very sternly and put down her work-bag. “Does this mean,” she demanded, “that you are thinking of being married?”

“No,” I explained. “I am thinking of being divorced.”

“But,” she insisted, “you *are* divorced.”

“Yes, that is what I am thinking of. If I could make any woman happy, I would have made Marcella so, because I could never try so hard for any woman as I did for Marcella.”

Mrs. Malory took up her work again and started to sew. “It is none of my business,” she began after a pause, during which I balanced expectantly on the edge of the couch.

“But it is your business,” I pointed out, “because I asked you.”

“But it is such a queer thing to say,” she expostu-

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lated, and blushed slightly. I understood then that Mrs. Axson had prophesied truly, but I listened to Mrs. Malory and thanked her warmly. When I took my leave she held up something out of the work-bag for me to look at. It was bifurcated. "They are Joan's," she explained.

Joan is the youngest and is named for her. In some ways Mrs. Malory is the most shameless mother I know.

I cannot, after truly impartial reflection, be convinced that Mrs. Malory has come any nearer the heart of the matter than the Reverend Bertrand Witherspoon. I want to know why, wanting Marcella and having had her, I have her no longer, and I do not see that children explain any more than materialism. Marcella didn't want children, and to me that settled the question. I thought she ought to have control of the matter because she would have to have the children. And even after seeing Joan's underclothes, I still think so. I was fairly indifferent. I didn't wish to adopt newsboys, and yet I think children are rather jolly between whiles. Would it be just to let that predilection outweigh Marcella's agony and a year of Marcella's life? Mrs. Malory thinks so. I fancy Witherspoon would

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agree with her. Perhaps they don't include in their calculations that at the time of the debate I was in love with Marcella and would probably have undergone a capital operation rather than have had her finger squeezed hard twice. Anyhow, it is impossible, among the educated classes, to discuss motherhood. With them is it either a joke or a fetich. It is a joke with Mrs. Axson. It is a fetich with Mrs. Malory. Houston Street looks the matter squarely in the face, and I think Houston Street would call down blessings on my head.

The truth of it is Mrs. Malory and the Reverend Bertrand are primarily wrong. They have gone deep enough, Heaven knows, but they have bored in the wrong place. He probed an example of matrimony, and she Marcella, and it is in me the secret lies. I am not fault finding with divorce. I believe divorce is an excellent institution. I also approve of matrimony and of Marcella. It is I who have failed. A man, it seems to me, should, above all things, keep his wife if he wants her. I have lost mine, and I believe I have failed, failed above all things, failed as a man in the essential of manhood, and as a human being in the necessity of humanity. I may marry again, I may even care for

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another woman, but Marcella was my mate. Nature intended me to keep Marcella, and I have done less than Nature intended me to do. That, it seems to me, is to fail completely. For I do not think Nature intended any of us to do very much; to eat, and drink, and sleep, and mate are all she demands. When we have eaten and drunk and slept and mated, then supernature takes charge over us.

I remember that at the time of my marriage I was generally considered to be in love, rather too much so for my dignity's sake, some of my friends thought. (I was twenty-four at the time.) And it is useless to deny my suspicion that I still am. This must knock my dignity into a cocked hat, for if it is *infra dig* for an engaged man to be in love with his fiancée, it can be little short of farcical for a divorced man to be in love with his ex-wife. This is very queer, for I am quite sure that the only emotion that can ever lift me higher will be a love of God, and it is improbable that ever will, for I don't know anything about a love of God. I am a Protestant, and Protestantism is so greatly a matter of behavior, which has nothing to do with the love of God. No, that is not yet for me in the world. But there are lesser heights that may be won. Passing over

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these, we may come beyond them to the other. And it was through love of Marcella my path led, and that path has been stopped for me by the Supreme Court.

Sometimes, as at the present moment, I should like to spank the Supreme Court.

II

“WHAT,” asks Saint-Simon, apropos of a banished friend, “what is there to meddle with in Genoa?”

That is really a very important question concerning any place. It is peculiarly important to me just now about New York. The only thing I have found to meddle with in New York is Courtland Brown. There are undoubtedly hundreds of human beings among these five millions or more fellow townsmen of mine who deserve and would welcome meddling. Courtland Brown doesn't do either. He is a drunken bankrupt, who has never passed a day in honest labor since his birth, and who consents to live in my house because it costs him nothing, as he told me himself once when he detected, I suppose, that I was growing vain of his preference. Yet, such as he is, he appeals to my perverted philanthropy. I suppose one explanation is that I have always known him. Another may be that his degradation was continually in my sight. My philanthropy, apparently, is of the short-sighted sort, to specify one of its infirmities.

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Brown reminds me forcibly of a poor fellow I saw hurt in a football game, lying on the side-lines with several substitutes sitting on him, raving and struggling, giving signals, still playing the game, as it were, in his delirium. Courty, too, has been playing the game in delirium. He used to be a cotton broker and got badly injured. He thought it was going to be a dry June, whereas June turned out to be uncommonly wet, or something of the sort, and he lost his money. (He tells me the story so frequently that for his sake I try to forget as much as possible of it between whiles.) Of course, after losing his money, he ceased to be cotton broker in reality, but in his delirium he failed to recognize the fact and went on with the motions of playing the game, watching at the ticker and drinking, drinking disreputably. Now, I have got him to the sidelines, and I am sitting on him as the substitutes sat on the injured athlete. He struggles mightily, but so far I am still on top.

He is quite inaccessible, I am afraid, to moral persuasion. If he were married, or even had an aged parent, I might succeed better, but the only assistance of this kind I can discover is an aunt in Duluth, and she is quite useless as a stimulant of her nephew's con-

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science, and I had to try appealing to his higher self, a senseless phrase I must have picked out of a magazine. The discussion of this higher self grew slightly psychological, and he asked me what happened to the higher self when he got drunk? There I faced a rather disagreeable dilemma, for I couldn't very well represent my single ally as his boon companion on sprees, yet, if I explained that the sublimated ego remained sober on these occasions, he would probably have ruled that person out of the discussion as an unconcerned spectator. I let the discussion fall silent and there was no good achieved, which doesn't surprise me very much.

The problem seems to me a much simpler one than that of spiritual intoxication. If I can keep Courty sober for a month or two and then get him some work in the office, he may pull through yet. To keep him sober it is necessary to keep him away from alcohol. He has about as much will-power as a weeping willow. I first thought of locking him up in the house, but, as he himself pointed out, no one can turn a residence in Fifty-third Street into a Bastile by means of a latch-key. He is mildly interested in his own conversion, though apparently quite hopeless of its consummation. But I have solved this problem finally, and rather

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neatly, I think. It is curious how these matters simplify if you go about them without advice. The solution was suggested to me by the key of a motor-car. I saw a man slip the key of his car into his waistcoat pocket and walk off, leaving the car an inert, helpless mass. The key of locomotion was removed. A pair of horses was necessary to move the thing. It occurred to me that what the man had done to his motor-car was precisely the sort of thing I wanted to do to Courtland Brown. I could only keep Courty in the house by removing his key of locomotion. It is easily enough seen that the key of masculine locomotion in civilized communities is trousers. I removed Courty's trousers, and I made Habliston, the butler, lock up mine and his own, except those in actual use. Courty has a dressing-gown which does very well for the house. If he were to get out he would unquestionably be arrested within half a block, and as his only excuse would be that he was going for a drink, he would probably get a long term in jail, which might be the best thing for him. He is even more securely tied than the motor-car. I don't believe a pair of horses could get him down the street.

All this would produce inextinguishable laughter at

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the club, where Courty's popularity was due to his wit. He used to laugh at nearly everything in the world. Now the jest is pointed against the scoffer, but it seems to me a very bitter repartee that even the salvation of his soul should be turned into a sort of low comedy farce.

He said that of himself to-night, sitting across the fireplace here. It is a bitter thing for a man to say of himself. He went away immediately afterward, and I saw by the twitching of his fingers that every little nerve in his body was asking for whiskey, and that the blue flannel dressing-gown was flopping around his long legs.

I can't deny him either the humor or the bitterness of the thing, still I fancy every one at some time hears a tinkle of the "Laughter of the Gods" which I used to construe so painfully at school. There is another witticism being enacted in this house. Courtland Brown has nothing to do with it. It is between Habliston, the butler, and me. He is a fat, bald, solemn, little man, the shortest butler I have ever seen, and a tremendous conservative. When Marcella went away, I moved out of my accustomed room to the one over the front door, and I have been trying to live there

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ever since. Habliston, silently and efficiently, for some reason, refuses to recognize the rearrangement. He has given, somehow, an air of transiency to the room, so I feel exactly as though I were spending a few days at an hotel. There is a trunk, for example, in one corner. He says this is necessary because of the scarcity of presses. I don't believe him, but he knows infinitely more about the matter than I do and triumphs in every argument. For some other reason, I can have only small, straight-backed chairs. In the end, I suppose, he will have his way and I shall be moved back where I came from. There are four other rooms I might use, but I am sure he will be content with no other. Meanwhile, Marcella is occupying her Uncle Fred's one spare bedroom at Babylon.

This is the big and the little of Fate's jest with Pierre Vinton, householder. It does not, however, cause me inextinguishable laughter.

.

Shortly before I was married Mrs. Axson gave me a pocketbook, in which were two letters, and, although I lost the pocketbook long ago, I have kept the letters. I don't believe the writer of them ever knew I had them. I remember once quoting to her from one of them

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a sentiment concerning a Miss Butcher, and she apparently had no recollection of it at all. Thereafter, I never mentioned the matter. I can remember the circumstances of the first letter very well. Marcella was eighteen and I was twenty-one, and Goshen is in New Hampshire.

“GOSHEN.

“DEAREST LILL:

“I do wish you were going to come back in September, so you could be one of Mae Tenafly’s bridesmaids. She is awfully cut up because you can’t, and so am I. The dresses are going to be yellow—your color.

“This house-party is a howling success. We play tennis, swim a lot, and sail a little, only the sailboat is a frightful old tub, and nobody likes it very much. There is a friend of yours here, that Pierre Vinton, who used to live next you in the country. You know his mother has just died, too, and he is living all alone with an aunt, who is an awful snob, Mrs. Butler says. So he is going to spend the summer here. He is a great friend of Ted’s, and they are going to have rooms together at Cambridge next year.

“I don’t think he is very good-looking, but he has awfully nice teeth. I think that fat Elsie Butcher is

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trying to catch him, because he has lots of money. She is very mercenary, I think, and not a bit attractive. She never lets him go for a minute. He seems to like her rather, but I don't believe he could have any respect for her.

“Lots of love,

“Devotedly,

“MARCELLA.

“P. S. I had to break off quick like that, because Mr. Vinton came up and made me talk to him. He talks about you all the time. I bet he used to be awfully épris with you. I hope I have not said anything mean about him.

“Did I tell you Mae's wedding is going to be yellow? Do try to make the family come over for it. Mr. Vinton says so too.”

How vividly that letter recalls Marcella. She was a scant eighteen years that summer, little more than a schoolgirl, and as brown as an autumn leaf—brown-haired, brown-eyed, brown-skinned—sun-stained as an Indian. All of us lived as much in the lake as on the shores, but Marcella, I think, rather more. She used to wear a khaki skirt and a big, soft-brimmed Panama

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hat when she was out of the water, and a black silk bathing suit and a red silk handkerchief when she was in it. At least, that was the programme of the toilet, I believe. As a matter of fact, she wore either indifferently, and, strange to say, neither was becoming to her. It was not until I saw her in town in the autumn that I realized how pretty she was. It was on a Sunday in October, when I walked to church with her down on Long Island, when she wore a big yellow hat.

But, no matter. This is rambling, and I had best stick to the lake. Only, how these little things come back!

She could beat me at swimming, also at paddling a canoe, I remember; both mortifications I shall never outlive. We used to go swimming together before breakfast. It was so our peculiar intimacy began with those before-breakfast baths in ice-cold blue waters. We always felt we had, in more ways than one, got a start on the others by the time we broke eggs next one another at breakfast. She had always to wake me for those plunges, rapping at my door and then opening it a trifle and tossing in my bathing clothes, which hung on the porch overnight to dry. Then I could hear her outside whistling while I got into them.

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It was the frankest, freest, most innocent friendship a boy and girl ever played through up to love, and it was Marcella who made it that way. I would not so much call her innocent as uninterested in everything except what was healthy and clean and out-of-doors. One tiny incident gave me a vision of her that I can never forget. She was reading that summer "Henry Esmond." It was a trick of hers to pick out some long, discursive tale and ponder over it for months at a time. She was reading "Henry Esmond" when we met, and she had not finished it when we married. One afternoon, lying in a hammock on the porch, she looked up at me from the page and asked: "What is a bar sinister?"

I remember I was embarrassed, and tried to explain, and succeeded very badly but sufficiently to give her at least an idea of the phrase's meaning. She only nodded for an answer and went on with the story.

It was more than two years later, when we were married, and she was still reading "Henry Esmond." Once again she looked up from the page, probably the same page, and asked me: "Pierre, what is a bar sinister?"

I have known innocent women and pure women, a plenty of both, but I have never known another for

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whom a suggestion of that sort would have been quite lost, in whose mind it would not have found some little crevice to cling to, some little store of curiosity to feed upon. But there was no such place of nourishment in her consciousness. It is a minutely unimportant happening, but it has always seemed to me a tremendously significant one.

This is the second letter:

“BABYLON.

“Yes, my dear, it is true. I told him to cable you.

“I don’t wonder you were surprised. It was awfully quick. I didn’t want it to be so quick. I had made up my mind, if he did say anything, that I would turn him down hard, but I didn’t. Oh, Lilly, I am an awfully soft sort of person, after all, I am afraid. I am afraid of all sorts of things these days. I am terribly afraid, not of him exactly, but for him. Maybe, though, I am afraid for me. I don’t know what it is really. I am just afraid, I suppose.

“What little liars we were, Lilly, when we used to say that we didn’t want to be married, only we supposed we must, or every one would think us frumps. At least, I was a liar, and I suppose you were, too. And

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that scared me, too. Isn't it queer? I was never so happy and never so scared before in all my life.

"I am sure of one thing, though. I care. I knew that before I knew about him. It was up at Goshen. He had gone away for two days' fishing, and all the second day, before he came back, I couldn't keep his name out of my mind. Lilly, my dear, I went around that whole blessed day, saying to myself, 'Peter, Peter, Peter,' like a quail whistling. And that night when I went to bed I didn't go to sleep for a long time. I got up and sat at the window. I didn't think of him only, or of anything particularly. But suddenly I said to myself, right out of nothing: 'You love him.'

"I was so scared, I dropped down on my knees, and said out loud, 'Oh, God! Oh, God!' and that woke up Mae, and she asked me what was the matter, and I said, 'Nothing.' Wasn't it awful to tell a lie like that on my knees, praying? But I couldn't help it."

The letter ended here at the bottom of the page. There may have been more, with a signature, which Mrs. Axson, for good reasons, did not send me. I imagine there was. Marcella was not a spasmodic soul.

These two letters and one trunk are the only things of

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Marcella's left in my house now. Once I started to send the trunk to her but decided to look into it first. When I had looked into it I knew she didn't want it. In the tray was some jewelry I had given her, all the jewelry I had given her, pieces I had forgot the existence of. I understood that. But the rest of the trunkful puzzled me at first. It was a litter of old invitations, notes of society such as every woman gets; scores of cards of admission to all sorts of places, notifications of her election to this or that society, requests of her patronage for charities, for balls, teas, plays; receipted bills, and handfuls of cotillon favors, paper flowers, gim-crack jewelry of all sorts. That was what she left. I had given her all of them. Each thing had been given to Mrs. Vinton.

After I looked carefully through all that rubbish I put down the trunk lid and asked myself what else I had given her? My own soul and body, I answered boldly. What more could a woman want? Evidently something, but as yet I know not what.

.

My Aunt Louise has returned to New York, and a few days ago she sent for me. She is staying at the Buckingham. I suppose the Buckingham represents to

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her New York's best imitation of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Her mother, my grandmother—Aunt Louise is my maternal aunt—was a De Meilhac, and, if all Aunt Louise tells me of the De Meilhacs is true, Mlle. de Meilhac was guilty of a frightful *mésalliance* when she married my grandfather. I remember when I asked my father about this, he briefly replied: "The less said about your grandmother, the better." Mrs. Grandy says such a great deal about her, I am tempted sometimes to repeat this to her.

I went to the Buckingham in some trepidation, being uncertain of the attitude of the *ancienne noblesse* to divorce, and, when necessary, Aunt Louise can imitate the *grande dame* very impressively. Sometimes, when she tells me to be seated and points a long, slender white finger at the very chair I am to occupy, I almost believe in the De Meilhacs myself. I think her hair has got whiter of late. It is the color of this paper now, and her figure makes even Marcella envious. She was dressed in black to receive me and looked, as usual, rather care-worn and defiant in the dark, walnut-panelled room.

She was very affectionate, however, and scarcely spoke of Marcella, wherefor I was intensely grateful

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and concluded that the *ancienne noblesse* disapproves of divorce. For once I am in sympathy with the Faubourg Saint-Germain. In my enthusiasm I recklessly asked Aunt Louise to dinner. It was not until she accepted that I remembered Courty, a piece of monumental forgetfulness, which leaves me in a rather disagreeable quandary. There is no chance of her consenting to a restaurant. She would only be offended by the suggestion, and, of course, she would be more offended at being taken in to dinner by a man without his trousers, not altogether unnaturally, either. Poor Courty must be either locked up for the evening or else properly clothed. Either will be dangerous, I am afraid. I tried to introduce him gently into the conversation, when she asked me if I was alone in the house. I said: "Brown is living with me."

"Brown?" said my aunt.

As she said it, I confess it sounded vastly plebeian.

"Courtland Brown," I amended.

"Oh, *Courtland* Brown. Then he is a gentleman?"

"Aunt Louise," I remonstrated, "my guests are always gentlemen."

"I mean," explained my aunt, "technically."

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"Technically," I answered, "Courtland Brown is a *Sansculotte*."

My aunt looked hurt. She thought I was speaking disrespectfully of the French Revolution.

At times Aunt Louise exasperates me. Her mind is about as broad as her waist. She seemed very much interested and asked me several more questions about Courty, but I avoided them and changed the subject. It is impossible to be confidential about a man like Brown with a woman like my aunt. They could never understand one another in a thousand years of intimacy.

I don't quite understand my aunt myself. She apparently prefers the names of things to the things named. This is not an eccentricity or an affectation; it is the exact expression of her being, and a queerer being than one that can be so expressed it is difficult, it seems to me, to imagine. If the French government were to lay waste the Jardin des Tuileries and paste botanical labels on all the stumps, I can fancy Aunt Louise becoming an habituée of the place; I can picture her lost in admiration before a label: *Syringia Spirialis*.

It rather takes your breath away to leave a person of this sort and step out into New York at night. Aunt Louise is one of the minor works of God, I think,

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and New York is one of the vastest works of man, and the comparison is not very reverent. It fairly pounced upon me last night what a flashing, vivid, marvellous thing a city is at night—the leagues of light and the roaring of the wheels. It shrinks a little in the day, is visibly measurable, a trifle tawdry, and not altogether clean—a small human thing surrounded by immensities. But at night these immensities are hidden. Nature is asleep, as it were, and has left the place to men, and it seems to me they fill it then pretty completely. Their hand-made city seems gigantic, and their lights dazzle me. It was the pale moon up over the housetops which seemed feeble and theatrical. I have an awful reverence for my fellow men when the world is thus left to darkness and to them and me.

I can almost agree with Mrs. Malory at these times, that my highest duty is to introduce as many others as possible to the company of my fellow creatures. Only there is another side of the picture, when I think, for instance, of Father Witherspoon and his phantoms, of County Brown wrestling on the edge of Erebus with the devils he has painstakingly hatched out of his own soul, and of Aunt Louise trying to galvanize the feudal system.

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I want no fellowship with hypocrisy or devils or dead things. With what, then, do I want fellowship?—for I want it desperately with some one. With some one that lives, I fancy, without even the spawn of such devils in body or soul but has kept both clean-swept by health and happiness and who cares no more for metaphysics than for a burnt-out candle—if there is such a person in the world.

Of course, that is again Marcella, and she is to be found at Babylon—in Uncle Fred's one spare bedroom.

Oh, Marcella! Marcella! How am I going to live without you? That I am to do so I see plainly, but as yet I can make no beginning. The vision of you blocks every vista whereby I look to see beyond this tangle of daily life.

III

THERE is a Love of God in the world, say the Theologians; and that there is a Love of Woman is the experience of Mankind. The Philanthropists claim that there is also a Love of Man. I wonder!

A love must be capable of filling a human life, or else it is only an appetite. Can a man fill his life with the love of his fellow creatures. In the face of all the biographies, sacred and profane, again I say, I wonder!

I wonder because this afternoon two comparative strangers inspired me with inexplicable affection. Then there is Courtland Brown, whom I pity, and those loathsome tenements in Avenue X, of which I am ashamed. Is it possible that I could fan these faintly glowing embers into a life-sustaining blaze? I wonder.

Young Lawrence Hastings and a glorious blonde in a black velvet hat met me as I climbed out of the subway at Forty-second Street. The blonde was Barbara Gilbert, though I did not know it immediately, having never seen her quite so glorious before. There

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was a sunset flaring down Forty-second Street that was trying to be the finest thing to be seen, but it failed, I thought. In the phrase of Mrs. Axson, "the sunset had nothing on Barbara."

"Halloo, Pete," hallooed Laurie. There is nothing of interest in me to him. He merely wished to call attention to his own exuberance, like a rooster crowing.

Barbara clapped her hands and gave me one of them. Barring the difference in sex, the greetings were precisely similar.

"Been to the matinée?" I asked.

"Do we look like we had been to a stuffy old theatre?" asked Laurie.

"You look," I answered, "like you had been to Paradise."

"We have been to the Bronx Zoo," put in Barbara, blushing.

"Let's go to tea," I suggested.

We did. We went to Sherry's, and Barbara was the prettiest woman there. I thought so, and I overheard Laurie making the same criticism. But he is a worthless character, I am afraid. I noticed he knew the head waiter. No young man of Laurie's income has any business knowing head waiters.

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"Did you ever go to the Bronx Zoo?" Barbara asked me.

"You ought to go," said Laurie. "It is full of the darndest, funniest old animals."

"Thanks," I answered, "I think I'll stick to the club."

"Oh!" said Barbara, "that's rude. Papa is a member."

He is, too—a patient sort of trained seal, who runs a trust company daytimes and plays lady's-maid to his trainer at other times.

"Peter is a funny old animal himself," said Mr. Hastings.

Barbara gave me a long look over the teapot. She is about five thousand years older than he is. "Are you the cream or lemon eating kind?" she asked.

I declined, and she supposed that we both wanted whiskey, as I suppose we both did, but the supposition made us drink tea. Mine was the vilest drink I can remember this side of the nursery.

"I didn't think you'd drink it, so I just put in hot water," she explained.

"What did you think he would do with it?" asked Laurie. "Give it to a cold policeman?"

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"Oh, I don't know. What do men do generally when they want something that isn't given them?"

"Beg, steal, or borrow," quoted Laurie. "That's three ways."

"What do women do?" I asked.

"They just get it," said Barbara. "Men do, too. I meet men every day who do. They don't deserve, they don't earn, or beg, or steal, or borrow; they just get what they want."

She looked at Laurie and Laurie winced.

Laurie wants her. How is he going to get her? That is the question for those two.

It is a big stake for a man in Laurie's shoes to play for, and Mrs. Gilbert will see to it that he has "no favor." He is handicapped, too, by a father who made away with a trust fund. And, most fatal of all, he totally lacks audacity. Most men of my generation do. They have impudence instead. For example, I doubt if he kissed Barbara in the Bronx Park, which would have been audacity, yet he called her "Old Sox" at Sherry's, which was impudence. As I have never seen the two combined, I am quite certain he lacks audacity. Still, he is a nice boy, who smells of soap and keeps his hair smooth.

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He had no answer for that look of hers, except to light a cigarette. "How is Brown?" he asked me.

"Who is Brown?" asked Barbara.

"The human latch-key of New York," answered Laurie.

How Mrs. Gilbert must hate that boy. There is a certain aptness in his remarks which would be excruciatingly irritating if you had any cause to dislike him.

I tried to put Brown's case a little more clearly before Barbara. She kept her eyes fixed thoughtfully on mine the while. She has blue eyes, whose glances rest so softly as to be unfelt.

"Do you do that sort of thing much?" she asked me.

"What sort of thing?"

"Oh, pull people out of holes."

"Sure," put in Laurie. "He does it all the time. I told you he was a queer old animal."

When she drew on her gloves she held out her hand to me across the table. "Will you come to see me sometime?" she said. "I know lots of people who have got into holes."

"They always get out," I said.

"Do they?" she asked.

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"Invariably."

"Thank you," she said.

She went home in a cab. I hoped Laurie would go with her and make love violently for at least ten blocks, but they had other plans. I suppose he was not to be seen at the house. It was probably a stolen afternoon, that afternoon up at the Bronx.

He walked home with me instead. He is a cheerful youth.

"Barbara likes you," he told me.

I said I was flattered.

"Yes," he went on, "she likes you. To tell the truth, you are about the only friend I've got she does like."

As I have talked to him perhaps a dozen times in my life, I thought that even more flattering.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Laurie," I replied, "she is about the only friend you have I like."

I don't know who the others are, but I took the chance.

"Oh ! they are not half bad," he protested.

"Yes. But she is all right."

"Isn't she ? Look here. Let me tell you something."

What he told me lasted four blocks in telling, and I had known it all, of course, in four seconds on Forty-

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second Street. Nevertheless, he left me, pledged to immutable secrecy.

I liked them both. I enjoyed the party. I have talked to Brown about it all the evening. Having wrecked my own affair of this sort, I should like to try my hands on some one else's. Is this love of man, or the love of match-making. Am I beginning to be a meddler or a philanthropist?

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It is curious to observe what an important part trousers have come to play in human affairs. They have not, I believe, been in general use a hundred years, scarcely longer than steam-engines, but they are infinitely more influential. Courty, now, has been completely sober for more than a week. He has taken up drawing again, and he has done some rather clever things. I have one of them framed and hung in the drawing-room. This would give Marcella a fit, but it pleases Courty tremendously. Habliston, who is a paid spy, tells me he frequently sees him stealing into the drawing-room to look at it. I don't think Marcella would object if she knew this. No. I can easier fancy Marcella telling Courty it is a better likeness of me—it is a picture of me—than the Helleu is of her. Some-

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how, I can only picture her saying gracious things and doing lovely actions nowadays, though I know very well she can be very disagreeable when she chooses. I am proud of the picture, too, though I can't say I like to look at it. I regard it, in a way, as the child of my brain. Carlyle has a great deal to say about Fox's leather breeches that turned the tailor into a reformer. I begin to share his enthusiasm for the garments, since I have learned that they may turn a drunkard into an artist. That seems to me a more desirable alteration than Carlyle's.

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I have been operated on by a psychologist. I have been trifling with the business for several months in an amateurish sort of way, trying my own hand on it and trying Bertrand Witherspoon's too, and Mrs. Malory's, and Mrs. Axson's. At last, I determined to go to a professional and get it done with. He performed very skilfully over a dinner-table and in about an hour's time.

He was one of those damnable De Meilhacs. The French Revolution was not, I am beginning to see, as thorough an affair as Aunt Louise represents. Phillippe de Meilhac is a very pale fellow with good manners

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and rather long, pale hair, a bloodless, thin, silken-voiced cat fancier. Maltese cats is, I believe, his hobby, or perhaps it is Angora cats. At any rate, they are extinct, and he is trying to regenerate them. He believes in Bergson and enjoys Brieux; he drinks aperitifs, and he reproduces extinct cats. Aunt Louise, as usual, brought him over. We have known each other for years, and our common aunt is apt to say that we "were boys together." As a matter of fact, in boyhood, the Atlantic Ocean was generally between us, and we saw each other scarcely more than once in twelve months, but in that lady's scheme of life it is not unusual to ignore a circumstance like an ocean. Nowadays, Philippe and I exchange letters when either is visiting the other's hemisphere, and when we meet the procedure is always the same; the native puts the foreigner down at a club and asks him to dinner, and then I ask for his cats, and he asks me about my wife. But, to my great surprise, the programme was not completed; he did not ask for my wife.

"Why don't you ask for Marcella?" I inquired.

"Because," he answered, "I did not suppose you knew anything about her." He speaks English perfectly. The only lingual evidence he gives of foreign birth is

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a trick of using antiquated slang. He apparently thinks English slang is an immutable tongue. So, now, he added: "She has, I believe, flown the coop."

"She has," I admitted. The slang was of questionable age, but I must confess it was singularly apt. Marcella, it seems to me, has done exactly that. She has got out of a coop; she has spread the wings given her to fly with and has flown.

"She was a most charming woman," said Phillipé. "I should like very much to see her again."

"So should I," I answered.

He ceased salting his oysters and stared at me. "Really? Then why did she?"

I shrugged my shoulders. Phillipé never shrugs his shoulders. He is the bluntest, most phlegmatic fellow in the world.

"I suppose," he suggested, "she was bored."

"I suppose so. I would give," I added, "a good deal of money to know just why she was bored."

"I can explain," said Phillipé, continuing calmly to eat oysters. "You amused her as a lover, because you were rich and she was poor; but you bored her as a husband."

"You touch," I said, "the very heart of the mat-

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ter. I failed as a husband. What is a husband, Phillippe?"

"The good God only knows," answered Phillippe calmly. "He is a woman's nearest approach to a good friend, perhaps. He is the precipitate in her cup of life when the liquor of love has boiled away. That would sound better in French," he added.

"Then say it in French," I advised. "It sounds like a cooking recipe in English."

He laid down his fork. Then, very much as though he were reading from previous notes, he detailed for me my conjugal infirmities. He assured me that I could not have prevented the state of affairs he described. I was the victim of psychological conditions. He pointed out to me that *I* bored Marcella, not the marriage state or any other circumstance of Marcella's particular marriage state. The only way I could have prevented this, it seemed, was by falling in love with Mrs. Axson, but he admitted that my being in love with Marcella at the time was an impenetrable obstacle.

I once got an artist at Atlantic City to draw my portrait for a half dollar, and for an extra twenty-five cents he let me look over his shoulder while he did it.

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The only difference between the two situations is that I knew the grotesque figure on the drawing card was a caricature, but there is a diabolical verisimilitude about my cousin's portraiture that can't be ignored. When he had finished my picture he started to portray Marcella, but I put out my finger and stopped his pencil. That was not, I felt, included in the half dollar. Even the extra twenty-five cents did not cover that.

"You have drawn," I told him, "a most convincing likeness of me. Your keenness of observation is beyond praise. It shows scientific enthusiasm that will some day accomplish the regeneration of the Maltese cat, but still I feel that your skill will be baffled by Marcella."

"I believe," said Phillippe, "in examining these things frankly. By doing so we avoid making mistakes and collect information."

I felt that I had collected all the information I needed for the present and told him so. He went away to fill an engagement somewhere, and I suppose made a note of me before he slept, sandwiching me between two interesting cats.

I fancy very few of the human race for the last four or five thousand years have sincerely acknowledged

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themselves to be bores, judging from my difficulty in making this admission. It is a faculty almost atrophied by desuetude. My aversion to the task is otherwise incomprehensible. I realize frankly that I would rather have driven Marcella away by cruelty or by flagrant immorality. I prefer, apparently, being a brute, or even a rake, to being a bore. This truly is incomprehensible, and shows what a lamentable condition in this respect the human species has got into, if I am in any way representative of the human species, and I believe I am.

Such was the wisdom of Phillippe de Meilhac. It is the common-sense view of the situation. Marcella married me because she was poor, and then she divorced me for being a bore. I can very nearly make it rhyme, and when common sense rhymes it is generally regarded as additional proof of its wisdom. When a fool can prove his folly with a jingle he always feels triumphant. If I failed Marcella as a husband it was not because I bored her, but because I did not understand her. I understood her body well enough, and I tended that skilfully and satisfactorily, as Phillippe says, but it was her soul speaking when I did not understand. This is not common sense, and Phillippe

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would roar with laughter. Her body wanted silk and caviare and a lover, and I and Phillippe and the newspapers all understood that. I wonder what the other message was? It was not a sordid comedy of greed and stupidity we two played in marriage. It was a very common tragedy of two inarticulate mites of immortality groping for one another in the darkness and never touching. Now we have gone separate ways, and neither will ever know what the other would have said. It is this spiritual inarticulateness, it seems to me, which is at the bottom of most of the unhappiness in the world, as it is at the bottom of mine. We are deaf and dumb as beasts, for the most part of us. What is a poet? A man with a tongue in his soul.

Whereupon, I suppose, would come inextinguishable laughter from Phillippe. Arguing with him is very like playing tenpins. You set up the ideas, and he bowls them down with the facts. It is rather amusing if you did not care anything about the ideas, but I have a liking for this one, so I never set that up. He left me to fill an engagement somewhere, and I went to see Mrs. Axson. She is the best diagnostician of my social malady whom I know.

I have never appreciated Lilly Axson's beauty, I am

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afraid. She was wearing a yellow tea-gown with a great deal of lace about it, a few shades darker yellow than the silk, and her hair was a lighter shade than either, and her skin was paler than all. She was deliciously toned. She made me think of a contralto voice.

"You will probably destroy my reputation by coming at such an hour," she told me.

"I wish," I replied, "it could destroy my reputation."

"When did you get any such thing?" asked Mrs. Axson.

"This evening," I answered, "from Phillippe de Meilhac."

"Has that bore come back again?" said Lilly.

Pale yellow is becoming to her. I drew my chair closer to the fire and felt more comfortable. The fire was built of logs ten inches long in a pretty tiled fireplace with shining brass fire things and a shining glass screen.

"Put on another log," said Lilly generously.

I lifted one of the logs between my thumb and finger and laid it carefully athwart the irons.

"I couldn't," observed the author of the conflagration, "couldn't live without an open fire."

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Possibly she couldn't. The list of things she could not live without is appallingly long.

"Why do you call Phillipé a bore?"

"Why do you call anybody a bore?" said Lilly.

"He called me a bore," I said. "And he explained very exactly why and how."

"Who did he say you bored?"

"Marcella," I answered.

"How funny!" said Mrs. Axson. "Perhaps you did. I never thought of it."

"He said," I went on, "that I did nothing to interest her. And he suggested that if I had made love to you I might have interested her."

"If you had," interrupted Lilly, "I'd have smacked you. I love Marcella."

"But it would all have been for Marcella's good," I pointed out. "She would have liked me better, and that would have made her happier."

Mrs. Axson smiled. "Well, it is too late now," she answered.

"Is it?" I asked absently.

"What is the use of making Marcella jealous now?" Lilly asked very sensibly.

"Oh, none on earth," I agreed.

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It is very pleasant to talk in this way to a woman like Lilly over a fire of that sort. The fire might conceivably get out of hand and burn down the apartment-house, and I might conceivably fall in love with Mrs. Axson and play the deuce that way. The possibilities add a sporting flavor to the situation.

"What is M'sieu de Meilhac," asked Lilly after a pause, "doing in New York?"

"I haven't," I admitted, "the very faintest idea. Probably something about cats."

"What queer things," she observed, "men get interested in." She stuck out her foot with a gilt slipper dangling by the toe and swung it thoughtfully. "If I were a man," she continued, "I would only be interested in women. I should make it my business to know all about them, and then I should write books to interest them on evenings when they don't go out to dinner."

"That would be a delightful way of making a fortune," I agreed.

"I have often thought," she went on, "of taking some man's name and writing such a book myself. I know all about women, and I have plenty of time, that is, I could make plenty of time. If there was

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something really interesting at home there are lots of things I could give up doing outside."

I reflected that she had a husband and a son; but, then, Tom is in the Mediterranean, and the son is in the nursery asleep by seven every evening. Four times a year Tom's attorney pays her five thousand dollars, and about as many times a day the nurse brings little Tom out of the nursery. That schedule unquestionably leaves hours for idleness, as she observed.

"There are a great many evenings, you know, when I don't go out to dinner. What do you do, Pierre, the evenings you stay at home?"

I thought it over. "Generally," I answered, "I play double-dummy bridge with Brown."

"And I," said Lilly, "play idiot's delight with myself."

For the first time in my life it occurred to me that Mrs. Axson might regret her husband. It is one of Fate's little ironies that Tom should be chiefly interested in the bottoms of oceans. He goes all over the earth looking at them. Just now he is looking at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Lilly's forte, on the contrary, is keeping to the surface. Nevertheless, just then, I wondered if she ever regretted Tom.

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"Did he say you bored Marcella?" she asked, coming suddenly out of a reverie.

"Yes," I said, "he did. Confound him."

"Well, he's right. You did. Marcella was bored just as I am bored. That is the trouble with us nowadays. We are all bored, and we are just beginning to find it out. Do you suppose I like to play idiot's delight?"

"Sometimes," I confessed, "I, myself, detect the inadequacy of double dummy."

"Then stop. You have other things to do. But we haven't, you know. You have worked and saved and invented and devised until you have devised us out of all employment. We can't be having babies all the time, you know, and that is about the only thing we are accustomed to do you have not found some machine to do for us. And you didn't leave Marcella that. Bored!" cried Mrs. Axson, "I wonder she did not die of it!"

All this may or may not be true, but it was quite beside the point; it was not at all the sort of boredom Phillippe meant. So I told Lilly. To my surprise the remark made her very angry.

"I don't care if it is beside the point. The point is

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I want to talk about it. I want to talk about the—the—the general topic."

"But," I explained, "he was talking about me."

"And so, of course," she rejoined, "you want to talk to me about yourself. I am not fit to be talked to about anything else. Then, you can go home and talk to Mr. Brown. Or play double dummy with him. That is a good game for you both, double dummy—two dummies. Go home."

I rose with dignity and walked to the door. To my surprise, she did not call me back. When I looked at her I thought she was crying.

"What's the matter?" I asked, coming back.

"Go home," she said. "I mean it. Go home."

She did mean it. She was crying.

I V

MY great-grandfather left France forever in '48 and returned to Berne, where he died and where his daughter, Louise Renée de Meilhac, married Theodore Maltravers, my grandfather. Mrs. Maltravers, my grandmother, brought with her to America, as her dot, a considerable amount of personal jewelry. The history of the treasure up to the time of its arrival in America can be told only by her daughter, Mrs. Grandy, and it takes her about three hours. The narrative is very interesting and involves such peccadilloes on the part of her revered ancestors as robbery, extortion, adultery, and prostitution. Its history after its arrival in America is brief. It was promptly sold by the Yankee bridegroom, and the money invested in New York City real estate. I have just been down to look at the real estate. It was an unpleasant sight, Mademoiselle Louise Renée de Meilhac's dot.

This is the history which it takes my aunt three hours to recite. I shall try to condense it. A certain

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Madame la Comtesse de Meilhac was for a short time the mistress of a son of a mistress of a king of France. During her brief period of social distinction the lady procured for her real lover (she had two, the vivacious old lady), a simple Gascon gentleman, the privilege of the "Grandes Entrées" and for herself a handful of diamonds. But the distinction of the comtesse, my great-great-grandmother, did not last very long. The Duc du Maine shortly got himself another mistress. She lost her Gascon lover, too, and in '96 she lost her head; of all her splendor the diamonds alone survived. They, in the possession of the comtesse's descendants, survived the Terror; they survived the emigration, when they glittered feebly for a while in Strasburg, and the First Empire, and at the Restoration they once more shone in the salons of the Tuilleries; and they even survived the Revolution of July. It was not until the old gentleman at Berne, despairing of his caste and his king, gave his daughter to the Yankee that their light went out forever, as far as the De Meilhacs were concerned. Then they formed Mrs. Maltravers's dot, and their price, properly invested, has formed the chief support of her descendants ever since.

Now, the diamonds may have looked very well upon

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the neck of the Duc du Maine's mistress, but the real estate they bought is a blot upon the face of God's earth. I viewed it, too, from the front and at night when there was a light in every window and most of the grime was invisible. Each light represented a tenant and each tenant represents from ten to fifteen dollars a month in my pocket. How much is left in the pockets of the tenants afterward I have no idea. If I had a social conscience doubtless I should find out, but I haven't. I have only an idle mind. Therefore, I stood under the elevated tracks and looked up at the windows and tried to calculate just how much what I looked at was worth to me in monthly payments. It seemed impossible that the sum I arrived at could be concealed in such a poverty-stricken quarter. Three thousand dollars a month were somehow scraped together by the people who lived there and given to me. I do not believe any one of them ever saw such a sum in notes or coins. Yet every month that sum is got together by them and given me. This would all be very disastrous to a social conscience, but it is very interesting to an idle mind. What marvellous energy to produce such wealth out of such squalor. The offices of Vinton, Bragg, and Goadby are ten stories up with

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mahogany furniture and a view over the bay. You expect wealth amid those surroundings, but you do not expect it amid the refuse cans of Avenue X. Yet I find it much more easily in Avenue X. To an idle mind divorced from a social conscience such energy must be truly marvellous. Nor was the energy unproductive even then, although it was the hour of rest. I saw a child selling papers on the corner. I saw men and women coming and going by the doors of saloons. I saw a street-walker disappear in a black doorway.

My idle mind was quite satisfied by these sights, and I came home reassured as to the stability of my investment. "Nous avons changé tout cela," sang the Red Caps from the Saint Antoine. That, it seems to me, is only silly boasting. They broke the neck of the Comtesse de Meilhac in the Place de la Concorde, but I have her necklace safely hidden down in Avenue X. They have not, so far as an idle mind can see, really changed anything.

I sincerely believe that Avenue X is immutable. I do not believe that it can ever be changed. If I had a social conscience I should very probably hasten to get rid of whatever share of responsibility I have in the matter by selling Avenue X or by building there model

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tenements with red geranium boxes on the window-sills. But I have not such a spiritual attribute, and I therefore see that to do either of these things is to avail myself of an evasion. My model tenements would be lived in by cleanly people or else they would soon cease to be clean. The red geraniums would be tended by people who loved flowers or they would soon die. Wherefore I must needs get not only new tenements but new tenants as well. The filth of Avenue X is not in the gutters and bedrooms, it is in the hearts and minds of the people who live there. I should like to clean these, for I know very well it is out of the hearts and minds of Avenue X my three thousand dollars a month is got. It is these hearts and souls I really own and not the land in fact, and I should like to clean them up, should like to build model hearts and model minds instead of tenements, and plant geraniums in human souls. I know also that unless I can do this I can do nothing. That to rebuild Avenue X would be in reality to move it a block or one hundred blocks east or north, or west or south. The spot is a taint in the blood of the body politic and not merely a sore on the skin.

Now, to do all or any part of these things it is neces-

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sary to love Avenue X and there I am helpless. I could no more love Avenue X than a straw rick.

Mrs. Malory says this is not so. She bases her opinion on Courtland Brown. I was dining there and Avenue X came into the conversation after dinner.

"Look at Courtland Brown," said Mrs. Malory. "That proves you have a love for your fellow creatures."

"It can only prove at best," I answered, "that I am a specialist. Avenue X needs a general practitioner."

"It is the same thing," said Mrs. Malory, looking for thread in her work-box. "Even as you do it unto the least of these," she quoted timidly.

This, it seems to me, fatally obscures the question. And as Mrs. Malory proceeded the obscurity deepened. To Mrs. Malory Avenue X is a means of "acquiring merit," a sort of Buddhistic prayer box. Hers is the point of view of the educated classes. Now, the point of view of the political classes, so bitterly condemned, takes Avenue X as a means of acquiring votes, and I fail to see any vital difference between them. The avenue, however, is not so impartial. It greatly prefers the ward boss to the district nurse, I am told.

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I tried to explain this to Mrs. Malory, but I am very much afraid I did not make myself clear, because she said I was cynical, and there is in my comprehension of the situation absolutely no room for cynicism.

"Look at Eleanor North," said Mrs. Malory. "She bought a house in some horrible alley near Houston Street and lived there. Can you compare a woman like her to some drunken, vote-stealing politician? They adored her, too. They called her 'The Angel.'"

"They should have cut her wings," I suggested, "so she couldn't fly away with the local doctor."

Mrs. Malory is a most unsatisfactory person to argue with if you have any purpose of arriving at a conclusion.

"I think," she answered, "that it was splendid of her to marry the man she loved, no matter who he was."

Perhaps it was, but in the vicinity of Houston Street it was doubtless regarded as human. I happen to know that "The Angel" is now living within sight of Central Park, while the vote-stealing politician is doubtless still distributing "jobs" in the vicinity of Houston Street. Knowing this, I cannot so severely blame the neighborhood's preference as Mrs. Malory does.

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"Did you expect her to bring up her children," was Mrs. Malory's protest, "in a place like that?"

When Mrs. Malory introduces children into the conversation I do not believe in continuing it. Furthermore, I saw that she had got the better of me. Eleanor North had, indeed, done all that could be expected. To do more would have been to do wrong. It would have been, it seems to me, very wrong of Eleanor North to bring up her children in the gutter so that their mother might continue to be an angel. As I view the matter, Eleanor had determined to give up her life for the privilege of being called an angel. As Mrs. Malory views it, Eleanor had given it up for the benefit of Houston Street. It does not, however, matter the least in the world because Life has taken Eleanor North by the shoulders and refuses to be given up at all, totally disregarding both angels and Houston Street.

"Don't go," said Malory, putting down his paper as I rose; "I want to talk to you."

I confessed that I had been on the other side of his newspaper all evening.

"I was reading," he explained, "until you and Kate had finished talking rot."

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“We weren’t talking rot,” said Mrs. Kate. “Mr. Vinton is very interesting, and it would be very much better if everybody thought about such things.”

“I wonder what would happen if we all did,” asked Malory.

I said I didn’t know.

“Then I’ll tell you,” said he.

“Pray do,” I replied with politeness.

I cannot remember precisely what it was he did tell me, because I have heard it so often before. It was indistinguishable, like noises to which we have grown accustomed. The sum of it, however, was that if people continued to talk about the sacred rights of property the rights would cease to exist. This, it seems to me, is improbable; but, if true, very unfortunate for property, because sacred rights that cannot endure discussion have the habit, apparently, of getting themselves discussed more than any other sorts of things in the world, and, finally, of getting themselves talked out of existence altogether.

When I told him something of the sort he got angry. “Touch the right of property, and you touch the corner-stone of civilization,” said Malory.

“Perhaps. I don’t care. I have no wish to touch it.

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It seems to me ridiculous that progenital morality, as in the case of the De Meilhacs, should entitle me to so large a proportion of the earnings of those people, and I no more believe in the eternal validity of the parchment filed down-town in the record office which gives it to me than in a dried palm-leaf blown about the Sahara. To me, there is a *prima-facie* absurdity about the idea which neither corner-stones nor sacred rights nor all the customs of time can obscure."

"Honestly, Vinton," said Malory, "if I didn't know that you were a sensible business man in the daytime I would think you were crazy."

Thereupon I left. I was afraid I should tell Malory what I thought of him in the daytime. There is a fable about the world being supported on the backs of elephants. In reality, it is borne on the backs of asses, millions of asses, and Malory is one of them. Poor fellow! He bears a pretty large proportion and stands up bravely under his burden, and I have the highest respect for him, but he is an ass, none the less.

Of course he would retort that all my genius can suggest no better arrangement than the one he defends, and assuredly it cannot. But, at least, it can suggest a better method of discussion than one which

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babbles of corner-stones and sacred rights, on the one hand, and of millenniums and inherent rights on the other—a method which, discarding all four as improbabilities at best, would discuss instead without sentimentality or political mumbo jumbo both the inhabitants of Avenue X and their landlord.

Those inhabitants are found not weak if this method is employed. On the contrary, their energy is amazing. They are terribly powerful, and they are dirty in minds and bodies, and they are unintelligent. That is a terrifying combination—dirt, ignorance, and energy—and it is fortunate that the energy is absorbed in a landlord and an employer or in anything that is not dirty and ignorant, thus depriving the combination of its dangerous factor and rendering it not dangerous at all, only very, very pitiful.

Let us be truly and devoutly thankful, explains this method, for those whose hearts feel the true pity of it and try to wipe off the dirt and wipe out the ignorance and hope that they will succeed in wiping out both forever. But meanwhile the problem has gone with the energy. What are those who are merely the receptacles of this waste energy, this excess of humanity's wealth, doing with it? That's the question.

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"Ay, there's the rub," too, for me. Mrs. Axson is playing idiot's delight, and Pierre Vinton, Esquire, is not doing very much more.

THERE is nothing genuinely worth while hating except little things. For example, nobody who knew anything about the subject, I fancy, ever really hated the devil. Milton admired him; Goethe, at least, admitted his charm. It is because he is too big for hate. On account of this I can hate Stewart Dewar with unimpaired self-respect. He is very little.

The basis of my animosity is, I suppose, if I were to go into the matter, Dewar's complete civilization. We admire men and women, at least I do, in proportion to their power to resist civilization. Mrs. Malory makes the parlor-maid dust with meticulous solicitude the tomahawk of Geronimo fastened to the wall over Malory's desk in the library. So, again, my dislike for Stewart Dewar is accounted for. He is completely civilized. The most uncivilized thing I have ever seen him do is to eat raw oysters.

He evidences this by his intrepidity. His remote ancestors, I am told, feared everything—a thunder-

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clap, a leaf trembling in the forest. Dewar has lost fear. For the tutelary divinities of his ancestors he has substituted the police force. Yet he does not try to propitiate his god. He defies and abuses him. For the forest, whence the aboriginal Dewars derived their meat, he has substituted the stock-market, and in the wildest panic he sells and buys, advances, retreats, comes, goes calmly, intrepidly, like a god, when compared to his forefathers, skulking behind rocks and tree boles. At one time it was a consolation to me that he was afraid of sailboats; but since then he has bought the fastest motor-boat on the South Shore, and I now see that sailing did not frighten him; it bored him; the only interruption of the monotony he could anticipate was a cyclone. In his motor-boat a loosened screw serves the purpose and is vastly more probable. Hence he prefers the motor-boat. It is always so in his universe, which is built of stone and cement and ordered by electricity; a loosened bolt, an inch of naked copper wire would extinguish him instantly, and he rushes through it superbly calm with the greatest possible speed.

He would be truly an admirable figure, almost worthy of worship, if he were not utterly unintelligent. But he

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has no clearer sense of direction amid all this tremendous output of energy than a speck of rust on the fly-wheel of his motor-car. He cannot progress because he has no direction. He has not even the desire to accumulate money. He spends more than he makes. He is not even a miser.

I saw him yesterday driving his motor through the park. He dashed about the place for over an hour—I met him three or four times—at about forty miles an hour. Nothing could have been more characteristic of him. He was at once defying his tutelary divinity and enjoying the probability of landing himself and three friends in eternity before dinner time. It irritated me more than is usual, because Marcella was on the front seat of the car. She did not recognize me. In fact, at that speed, she could scarcely have recognized the Metropolitan Museum. I had some difficulty in recognizing her, for she was muffled in furs and disguised by a pair of enormous goggles.

It was almost dark when they came out of the park. I waited at the Plaza entrance until they did come out. The habit of looking after Marcella must have got a tremendous hold upon me while I was her husband. Finally, they came out and stopped within ten yards

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of me, while the chauffeur got down and lit the lamps. Marcella got up and waved her arms about like a semaphore, and I heard a muffled voice from out one of the fur wraps in the tonneau ask: "Cold?"

Marcella said: "Uh-huh."

It was not a very lovely vision, that grotesque, gesticulating goggled figure and that reply, but it was the first time I had seen Marcella since we were divorced. I was in the shadow of the wall, quite invisible to the profile in the motor. I waited until they had driven away, then I went home, feeling like a little boy who could not get another little boy to play with him.

It was a fifty horse-power, six-cylinder car that Stewart Dewar was driving. He is about five and one half feet tall and weighs very few more than one hundred pounds. His universe is ordered by electricity—telephones, telegrams, lifts, push bells, motor-cars, subways. He regards the country, I think, as a quiet place to play cards in. The cement and steel-nerved city with copper wire is the womb in which he was conceived. He is a strange product, as devoid of intelligence as the most powerful motor-car in his garage.

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Courtland Brown is a most unaccountable person.

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The three weeks I have lived with him have shown me that I know nothing about him. I expected him to be an unmitigated nuisance. He has most remarkably disappointed the expectation, and I still know nothing about him. Neither does Habliston, which is truly amazing. Habliston at first was a spy and reported every morning Mr. Brown's actions of the day before. The reports grew less and less, and now we never discuss Mr. Brown. If Aunt Louise were to ask me now if Courty was a "technical gentleman" I should answer without hesitation in the affirmative, relying upon this tacit assurance from Habliston.

He spends a great deal of his time since liberty and breeches have been restored to him on Riverside Drive doing I know not what. I am not quite certain whether I expect him to be brought home drunk from these visits or not. It would be the most natural thing in the world from the general point of view. From the particular one which I have insensibly adopted of late it would be a tremendous surprise. I switch back and forth between the view-points in an unpleasantly vacillating manner.

I told him this to-night to explain my irritation when he was late for dinner. He laughed and said he himself

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did not know. Then I proposed the Avenue X scheme to him.

"Courty," I said, "how would you like to be an angel?"

"How soon?" he asked.

"I mean," I explained, "an angel like Eleanor North. Live down on Avenue X and show everybody the evil of their ways?"

"Probably I could show them a good deal," he meditated.

"Think it over," I suggested. "I want an angel down there."

"You are going to kill two birds with one stone," said Courty. "Me and Avenue X."

In a way that is true. It would be still more like a cock-fight—matching the two birds against each other. If he agrees I have not the slightest idea what he will do in Avenue X or how. These are details. The idea is an inspiration, and inspirations are smothered by details. They can only be managed properly when they are managed in the grand manner. I assumed the grand manner in presenting the idea to Brown.

"If you are going to live a decent life you will necessarily be a beneficent influence in the avenue. If you

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are going to lead any other sort of life the avenue is an excellent place for you to live it in."

"What could I do?" he asked. "Teach all the little blackguards how to swing Indian clubs?"

The inspiration would have been smothered in five minutes if I had attempted to answer this sort of question. I explained my theory of inspiration and left the matter so.

Poor Courty! He is a victim of compensative morality. He did not even ask why he should be a source of beneficent influence anywhere; why it would not suffice him merely to absorb beneficence of the sort emanating elsewhere. Instead, he asked if there was a monetary reward for the diffusion of beneficence in Avenue X.

I waved my hand in the grand manner. "Munificent," I assured him.

"I'll think about it," he replied.

After all, what more can an inspiration ask for itself than to be thought about, to arouse reflection?

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It is curious how completely women can emasculate masculine clothes. I met Miss Barbara Gilbert this afternoon in riding clothes; not a habit, but breeches

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and boots, a long coat, and a stiff hat, and a more female appearance I never saw the human figure present. She was wandering rather aimlessly down West Fifty-seventh Street, looking up at the house numbers, and she said she was looking for nineteen. A friend of hers lives there, and they were going riding together.

"It is rather shocking, isn't it," she asked me, "going on the street in these things?"

"It would be extremely shocking if a man did it," I told her. "If I met a man I knew wearing things like that I'd cut him, and if his tailor met him he would probably shoot him."

"What's wrong?" said she. "I bought them at Brook's. I thought they were rather good."

"They are awful."

"I wish I had a cab," she replied. "But I can't. I haven't any money. I don't know where to put it. What pocket do you put money in—in riding things—so it won't come out?"

I told her that no such pocket had ever been made by a human tailor in anything. "But there is," I added, "at the top of the breeches——"

"Don't be too literal," she advised, "and, anyway, I can't unbutton the coat. That's one of the rules."

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The only scheme I could think of was a groom or a maid to walk behind and carry the cash.

"Why not Laurie?" I suggested.

"Laurie," said Miss Gilbert, "hasn't any money to carry."

"So he told me," I answered.

"Yes, he told me what he told you. I think it was rather fresh of him."

"Everybody," I replied, "tells me secrets, because I never tell."

"Yes. He told me that too. Still, it's done now," she added frankly. "What did you tell him?"

"Didn't he tell you that?" I asked. "I told him you were quite the nicest person he knew."

"Oh!" said Miss Gilbert. "I thought you were going to end that differently."

"Most people would have," I agreed.

"I know I am past nineteen," she answered. "When are you coming to see me?"

"To-morrow afternoon," I suggested.

"Come after dinner. I am going to be alone all evening. Mamma and papa are going out."

I confess this sounded more attractive. Mrs. Gilbert is a most uncongenial person.

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She looked at me quizzically as she stood on the lowest step of nineteen. "I'd give a great deal," she remarked, "to know just what Laurie did tell you."

"He told me nothing that he has not said to you," I answered.

"I wonder if he told you everything he has told me," she said.

"I am not sure," I replied, "but I doubt if he did. He led me to believe that there was something he had said to you that he would never, as long as he lived, say to any one else."

She blushes attractively, which is a feat for a pronounced blonde. She blushed attractively now, and ran into the house, and as I continued down Fifty-seventh Street I felt quite convinced of the existence of a love of humanity.

For some reason Brown considers that call of mine a tremendous joke. He is very witty on the subject, and when I speak of philanthropy he howls with laughter. The cause of his mirth is Barbara's beauty. Apparently he thinks a beautiful woman outside the pale of philanthropy; they cannot be included in a love of humanity.

Mrs. Axson understands me better, but disapproves

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of my efforts because they will be wasted. She says that both Mrs. Gilbert and Laurie are fools, and as nobody can help fools so I shall be discouraged in a worthy cause.

Between them I find the path of true philanthropy a very narrow one.

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I have just been with Mrs. Axson while she had her boots polished in Madison Square. This is a result of my late sociological activities. So far, I must confess, it is the only actual result. Brown is reflecting, so am I; but Mrs. Axson, like a woman, has acted.

"Do you suppose," she asked, "the sort of polish they use will ruin the leather?"

I convinced her that this was a slander circulated by a trust to injure the independent trade and she consented. I beckoned to a boy. He came enveloped in a cloud of rivals.

"Competition," I pointed out, "is yet unstifled in Madison Square."

"Drive them away," said Lilly. "Drive them away."

Her tone was not at all in accord with my sociological theories. "They are not mosquitoes," I replied sternly.

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"Nor," said Mrs. Axson, "am I a centipede."

I smoothed over this mutual misunderstanding as best I could and retained one of the applicants. He proudly spit on his hands and grasped Mrs. Axson's ankle.

"I am afraid I didn't pick out a good one," I said apologetically.

"I am afraid you didn't," said Lilly.

"It is more or less guesswork," I admitted.

"What are you pinching my toe for?" she asked.

The bootblack didn't know, nor did I. I told her it seemed to me a perfectly senseless habit.

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Axson, "you don't know very much about it."

As this also applied equally to the bootblack and me, I left the answer to him and gazed at the top of the Metropolitan Tower across the street. I hope Courtland Brown will make a better angel than Mrs. Axson. Otherwise he will be lynched.

I am afraid I was unfair to Lilly at the time. I thought that her attitude was snobbish. I still think so. But then there is nothing inherently blameworthy in snobbishness. After all, it is only a fear of defilement. Its character depends on what is protected. In this

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case it was the beautiful. My sociological theories do not include the beautiful, and I cannot sufficiently stretch them to do so. To me there is always the same irreconcilable antagonism which developed between Mrs. Axson and the bootblack. This is because, I suppose, my sociological theories are founded on justice, and beauty is so unjust. One is a principle of division and the other of selection.

The principle of selection with Mrs. Axson was applied, I can certify, as far away as her second great-grandfather and has been applied as immediately as the angle of her hat brim. It was all visualized for me, this tremendously complicated operation by Mrs. Axson. The principle of division was visualized, too, very vividly so, by the bootblack. I gave him twenty-five cents to soothe his feelings and I took Mrs. Axson up-town for tea to soothe hers. The tea cost, I remember, one dollar and a half.

V I

I MET Mrs. Axson on the street yesterday while I was walking up from the office. When I told her what I was doing she said: "Oh! Then you can go shopping with me," as if it were the most sequential thing in the world.

She seemed quite eager about it and accordingly we entered Altman's. Immediately she left me to wait at the door while she bought stockings. But, apparently changing her mind, she came back and asked me if I was going to the Eastmans.

At that moment I don't believe that I had ever heard of the Eastmans. If she had said the East Indies I should have been taken less unawares.

"Why should I go?" I asked.

"Oh, everybody is going."

I suggested that unless my presence at the Eastmans' would affect her choice of stockings I should like time to think it over. She smiled pleasantly and disappeared in the crowd.

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When she came back I told her I was not going to the Eastmans. Whereupon she smiled absently and said she must buy a collar. She asked me if I could find the collar counter. I struck off blindly in an easterly direction, steering by floor-walkers, and was in sight of the collars when she saw an umbrella and stopped to buy that. Then she led me to the ribbon counter and asked me if I thought it was a good time to buy "steel." I said it was not, and she dropped the subject and bought an immense quantity of yellow ribbon instead.

"Now," she said, "all I need is a book-marker, and we can go home."

I was very anxious to go home, but I do not believe I would ever have done so if it had depended upon my finding a book-marker in Altman's. Lilly did so, however, without a single floor-walker. Then she turned to me without a trace of pride and remarked: "Marcella is going to the Eastmans."

Before I could answer she asked the clerk for a purple silk book-marker with an ivory cross.

Then I remembered that the Eastmans were man and wife, and that they were going to give a ball in a sort of castle they had built overlooking the park.

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"If you will go I will take you," offered Lilly as we walked away from the ribbon counter. Her conversation is always crystalline, clear in expression, but often tangled in its continuity.

"Thank you very much, indeed," I answered; "but I don't know the Eastmans."

"Nobody does," said Lilly. "That's why we are all going."

"I want to be original," I answered. "You once told me that the only way to surprise New York was by not doing things—not being a broker or not having a telephone. Well, I am not going to the Eastmans."

"You would never be noticed one way or the other," said Lilly. "That's why it would be such a good place for you and Marcella to get used to seeing each other."

There was a great deal of truth in what Mrs. Axson said. There generally is. What would Marcella and I amount to in a spectacular way on the floor of the Eastmans' half-million-dollar ballroom? Scarcely a hundred dollars, I suppose; not as much as the smallest mirror.

"It is exactly suited to you and Marcella," declared Mrs. Axson. "I would not in the least mind Tom's being there."

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That is easily said while Tom is somewhere between India and Egypt, but, as a matter of fact, Lilly and her husband prefer separate continents. As an argument, however, it was crushing.

"Why on earth," I asked, when we were got out of Altman's, and were walking up toward Lilly's apartment, "why on earth should you care about an ideal situation for Marcella and me?"

"I don't know. It interests me. You see we are in the same boat."

It is curious I never thought of this before. Lilly's marriage has always seemed to me a peculiarly unpleasant example of this sort, and my own something quite different. I suppose, however, viewed from the outside, the resemblance is striking. Reflecting upon this disconcerting discovery, I was rude enough to walk half a block without speaking. I was brought back to consciousness by a traffic block at Forty-second Street. Lilly had disappeared. I waited. She did not reappear. I walked back several blocks, but I did not find her. It was not in the least alarming, but it was very annoying. I spent the better part of an hour patrolling ten blocks of Fifth Avenue's east pavement, and then I went into a drug store and telephoned to

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her apartment. She had not returned. It was the first time since I have known Mrs. Axson, the first time in twenty-five years, that she has done anything of this sort.

Later—several hours later—I called her again, this time from the club, and found her. She said she had stopped at the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company to cash a check. I did not ask her how the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company happened to be open at half-past four. I never say things to women they cannot deny. I said instead: "How about the Eastmans?"

"Oh, yes. Are you going?"

"I should be very glad to."

"I am so glad," said Mrs. Axson politely.

"You will keep to your bargain about taking me?" I asked.

"Of course. Call for me about ten. We will go together."

"In the same boat," I suggested, why I don't know, except that I am always idiotic when talking over the telephone.

She laughed queerly and rang off, and then I understood how I had hurt her by my silence when she suggested that she and Marcella were somehow sisters

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under their skins. Remorsefully, I called a florist, and sent her a quantity of flowers. That was probably almost as crude as my silence. That is the unfailing resource of a man when he thinks he has been a brute to a woman—to spend money on her.

The strangest part of it is that the method should be so frequently successful. Lilly was as pleased as a child. When I called for her the apartment was filled with roses. She opened the door of her bedroom and showed me a bowlful at her bedside.

"You never sent me flowers before in your life," she said.

"I thought," I explained, "that you had a mind above such things."

"My mind is not above anything that smells nice and looks pretty," answered Mrs. Axson.

To speak the truth, mine was not either at that moment. It was, I am afraid, pretty completely occupied with Mrs. Axson. She wore blue, and blue, I fancy, is her color. It covered her snow-white neck and arms like blue foam. She looked like the wave of a summer sea. I felt for one giddy instant that the wave of a summer sea was about to break over me and took a deep breath. A feeling of oppression as though I

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were physically overcome by all this blueness and whiteness—and when Lilly threw a great white fox fur about her throat she looked more like a summer wave than ever—was strong upon me when I sat by her in the dim-lit motor.

She was swept away from me twenty minutes later at the ballroom door by an Englishman with a tremendous mustache. I saw him solemnly revolving in a regular orbit about the ballroom floor, while Lilly was anxiously searching the walls for rescue.

While I was standing there in the crowd about the doorway, a woman passing in brushed me with her arm. I stepped back to give room, and as I did so she looked back and we recognized each other, Marcella and I. I fancied she stopped and I tried to make my way toward her, but the crowds held me back, and when I reached the place where she had stood she was gone. I saw her far down the room dancing with some one I didn't know. A man next me began to brush my sleeve with his glove where Marcella's arm had left a great smear of powder.

I had hoped to get it over with there. It would have been so easy to shake hands, speak indifferently, and separate in the crowd, and it might be so difficult

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under other circumstances. And I was quite self-confident, too. Lilly's dress was a tremendous assistance. But the chance was gone.

I think Marcella has grown younger. She looks ever so much younger than Mrs. Axson, and she dances with the verve of a young girl. I must have stood staring at her, for once when she passed close by the man next to me caught my glance and smiled.

"She dances beautifully."

"Who?" I asked coldly.

"That Mrs. Vinton."

I went to the smoking-room in a bad humor. There I found Malory. He needs a new dress coat. I don't believe he has bought one since Joan was born.

"What are you doing here?" he wanted to know.

"What are you?" I asked.

"Don't know. Let's have a drink." I imagine our greeting was precisely like that of ninety out of every hundred pair of men present. I had the drink and felt somewhat better.

"I saw Marcella just now," said Malory. "She is here, you know."

"So I suppose, if you saw her."

"She is looking tremendously well," he continued.

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"Is she?" I answered. "I saw Mrs. Malory here, and she is looking very badly. I bet you haven't given her a new dress for a year."

"Don't know," said Malory. "Don't suggest it to her." And he left me, doubtless thinking me in a bad humor.

Malory is a self-centred beast, like most provident fathers. He is so deeply engaged with his youngest son's distant future that his wife can wear a frock to tatters under his very nose and he would never notice it. I had seen Mrs. Malory and she did look pathetically shabby. The contrast between Mrs. Malory and Mrs. Axson was an unwholesome example for young girls, and Malory ought to be ashamed for allowing it to be presented.

I left the smoking-room, too, for a quiet place to smoke in and promptly lost my way. The house is a perfect maze of narrow hallways. Paduan Gothic a newspaper man said in describing it. What in the name of common sense is Paduan Gothic, and who would build a house of it except some creature like Eastman, who, I believe, inadvertently sat down on a copper mine in Colorado? I found a lift after a while and a profusely liveried flunky asleep inside of it. I woke

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him up and asked him where the thing went to. He said to the roof-garden.

They evidently had glass-covered roof-gardens in Padua—probably during a later Renaissance. They have gone out of fashion there now.

It was a beautiful place, massed with plants, with tiny lights among the leaves, and a cascade and fountain in the centre, and pink-tiled walks intersecting each other at every turn. Best of all, it was absolutely deserted, and there was a magnificent view across the park, the tremendous cliffs of the rows of apartment-houses on the west side blazing with light, and the great dark canyons that marked the streets. I found a bench next the glass behind the shrubbery and lit a cigarette, and wondered if my host had ever seen it.

Sitting there, I heard presently the lift come up and the iron door clang, and then Marcella's long-drawn sigh of delight—of delight at the beauty of it all. I did not turn. I had lived with her face before my eyes of flesh for three years and with the memory of it quite as vivid ever since, and could picture it quite perfectly—her glowing eyes, her lips just parted, and the deep-breathed "Ooh," only it used to be sometimes

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"Oh, Pierre," and will never be so again. So I did not turn.

Then I heard: "Well done, isn't it?" and I turned very quickly, for it was Stewart Dewar's voice.

He was standing behind her, humpbacked and immaculate as usual.

"It is the most wonderful thing I ever saw in my life," said Marcella. That is like Marcella, to exaggerate with a touch of enthusiasm that sweeps you along with her and makes you also think that it, whatever it may be, is the most wonderful thing in the world. It always affected me so, and she always called such times our "moments," when, as it were, our souls stood on a pinnacle of exhilaration, stood atip-toe and touched. If ever Marcella should read this she will understand, and though her cup be brimming will regret, if she regrets nothing else in the world, at least one of our "moments."

There had been probably some error in the construction of one of the pipes that fed the fountain and a jet of water spurted out beyond the stone basin and fell splashing on the stone walk. Marcella spied it and ran to the place where the water showed dark red on the tiles and stuck out her foot so that the cool mist-like spray fell on her yellow satin slipper.

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There was about her poise, standing one foot lifted, her hands holding her skirts aside, something of that wild grace that Marcella seemingly can bring straight from the woods into a ballroom that makes the old men along the wall smile while they watch her.

"Better be careful, Mrs. Vinton," said Dewar, "you will get your feet wet."

The words or something like them were at my tongue's tip. It was really a very odd sensation that they did not belong there. I was screened by a great century-plant (which this morning's papers say bloomed during the night and was one of the features of the ball). Looking between the broad leaves I could see quite plainly Marcella draw back obediently and hold out the slipper for inspection.

"It's wet already," she observed.

"You will probably catch cold," said Dewar.

This is true. She probably has a bad cold this morning. The remark irritated me.

Marcella sighed as if she felt so too, and led the way down the walk by the dry side of the fountain.

In the course of their explorations it was highly probable, I thought, that they would discover me. Being intensely irritated I rather hoped they would.

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They did not, however. The fountain fascinated Marcella, and she came back to it. It is just like her to come to a half-million-dollar ballroom and play with a tin fountain.

"If I were you," I heard her say, "I would run through it."

"It would ruin your dress," objected Dewar, who seemed to be rather an obstructive critic.

"It wouldn't ruin yours," she said, and came on past my century-plant again on the dry side.

I smiled. Knowing Marcella, I knew that finally she would get in that fountain and by any means except force would get him in too. I also thought it highly probable that the experience would give him a bad cold. I lit another cigarette and broke off a piece of the century-plant that obscured the view. Almost all my life it has delighted me to watch Marcella.

It occurs to me now that I was doing a rather ungentlemanly thing, playing the spy as it were. What Aunt Louise calls the "instincts of a gentleman" should have made me sneeze or otherwise declare myself, but, as a matter of fact, they never quivered me until now. I am probably an *ex post facto* gentleman.

The smoke of my cigarette floated out from between

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the leaves and curled and eddied above the walk where they passed. It was no more impalpable than the spray of the fountain that could only be detected by the refraction of the lights and the dark-red stain on the tiles. As the two were coming toward me Marcella suddenly ran a little ahead of him, hesitated at the edge of the spray, and gathered her skirt with one hand and curved the other over her head with the curved upturned palm as a parapluie for the silk flower in her hair. The glittering spray fell between us like a jewelled wall of gossamer. Then she broke through with a little joyous laugh, scattering a thousand tiny points of light.

It seemed to me that she could not have failed to see me, that she was rushing straight into my arms. Instead, she stopped with strange suddenness at the bench opposite and her yellow satin slipper went tumbling down the walk after her.

“Oh!” she cried, “I have lost my slipper,” and she caught hold of a bench to steady her balance while she held her stockinged foot clear of the cold tiles.

Dewar recovered the slipper and brought it back to her. The sight of Marcella had been like champagne to me, golden, exhilarating. I do not know what it

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had been to him. I could not see his face as he knelt to replace the slipper, but I could see Marcella's when he did and—to pursue the vintage metaphor—that sight of Marcella was like absinthe, green, maddening, flavored with wormwood.

"I can do it myself, thank you," she said quickly, and with one dexterous movement she did, and both of them stood on their feet again.

A stockinged foot, and a man on his knees before it—what is that, in God's name, to set a man's blood on fire? Scarcely more than common courtesy, but it seemed to me the shameliest intimacy. I should like to discuss this with a conservative Turk of the sort that bowstring their ladies for a lifted veil. I am afraid an Occidental mind would not understand. A jealous husband is the butt of all human ridicule. What of a jealous divorcee? That's a witticism for the high gods, flavored with that peculiar irony which they are said to relish most in their humor. My only excuse is that I forgot the supreme bench, I forgot the legislatures, and its statutes and decrees; I forgot everything except my naked humanity, which still apparently persists in claiming Marcella as its own. It is getting to be a habit with me, this form of forget-

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fulness. It is a damnably dangerous habit too. They passed within one yard of where I was crouched among the leaves, and if he had taken her in his arms, as she had every right to let him do if she so desired, perhaps he would have never got past. Do I not read of such things in every newspaper?

Before they reached the lift the iron doors rolled back and a crew of laughing, chattering men and women burst into the place.

“Is this the roof-garden?” I heard a woman’s voice call out.

“Oh, no,” answered an unseen humorist, “this is the forest primeval.”

Marcella and Dewar, I think, went down then, for I did not see them any more and the newcomers swarmed everywhere. I got away too, and coming down in the mirror-lined lift I saw that I had cut my hands on the century-plant’s thorns and stained my shirt-front with little drops of blood.

This compelled me to leave without seeing Mrs. Axson. I shall probably hear of it again.

VII

MY aunt, Mrs. Grandy is having a dispute with the Health Department. She thinks she has smallpox. The Health Department thinks she has chicken-pox caught through a clothes-basket from her laundress's daughter. It would not surprise me if Aunt Louise were in the right, though the hotel and press and general public are on the side of the Health Department. My confidence in her gratifies her immensely, I am informed, and it annoys Doctor Symington. This I regard as the double duty of relatives in case of illness to gratify the patient and annoy the physician.

"It is positively ridiculous," Doctor Symington told me when I met him on the steps of the Buckingham. "There hasn't been a case of smallpox in New York in these circumstances for ten years."

"And there hasn't been a king in France in sixty years," I answered, "and my aunt is a stanch Royalist."

Doctor Symington is in the early thirties and an

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enthusiastic scientist. He explained the rules to me that absolutely forbid her having smallpox and penalize her with chicken-pox. He had very much the best of the argument; nevertheless, I shall not desert Aunt Louise.

"Have you seen her?" he demanded with considerable violence.

"Lord, no, man," I answered. "I can't. I think she has smallpox."

Firmly as I uphold Aunt Louise, however, there are lengths to which I am not prepared to go. She sent out word that I must be vaccinated. I sent in word that I had been vaccinated, which is relatively true, for I was vaccinated thirty odd years ago. If this does not relieve her anxiety I am afraid of the consequences. I am a believer in the smallpox theory, but I am not a fanatic on the subject. I shall not mutilate myself for my creed's sake like a dervish.

Though I do not see her I go daily to ask after her. Sometimes I am admitted to the sitting-room, which is shut off from the other rooms by a great white sheet soaked in carbolic acid. That sheet is Aunt Louise's banner of defiance. Behind it she is impenetrably entrenched against the Health Department. Fräulein

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Hummell lifts it reverentially when she enters to bring me news of my plague-stricken kinswoman. The Fräulein has done her mistress's lightest bidding for thirty-one years, and is, of course, like myself a firm adherent of the smallpox theory. The Fräulein is genuinely distressed by my aunt's illness, which is queer because while Aunt Louise lives Fräulein Hummell's life will be an unceasing and none-too-well-rewarded servitude, and after Aunt Louise's death it will become a well-earned and dignified independence. Poor Hummell happens to prefer the servitude and to anticipate relief with apprehension. Her mistress says she is awkward, stupid, and a Lutheran. She is also ill treated, long-suffering, and an angel. Unfortunately she is as ugly as the practice of virtue and rigid economy can make a woman, so that my admiration always remains unexpressed in her presence. It would be impossible to compliment a woman as ugly as Fräulein Hummell on anything without appearing to joke in extremely bad taste. She suggests *La Gioconda* caricatured at full length. There is the same heavy face and severely simple coiffure, but the eyes are hidden behind thick glasses and the uncertain, unceasing smile is burlesqued by thick lips. Her waist is

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cylindrical, and about it her skirt is draped like the canvas about a shower-bath. Above, her billowy bosom heaves like a bellows and produces a deep bass tone which she forever tries to reduce to a whisper.

We conversed on the public side of the sheet concerning the illness, which she loyally represents as grave—I in a guilty whisper, the Fräulein in her tremendous basso profundo. I scarcely have ever spoken to her in my life except concerning her mistress, and I have been speaking to her for thirty years. I realize now that I have always thought of her as a certain manifestation of my aunt rather than as an individuality. She has represented, as it were, Aunt Louise too-ill-to-see-me, and Aunt Louise dressing and Aunt Louise taking a nap.

I had never realized this. That, I suppose, is why I did not realize that the first day of Aunt Louise's segregation was the first time, too, that I had seen the Fräulein alone for almost two years. We talked of the contagion in the room with the carbolized sheet, and reciprocally fortified our mutual faith in the contagion's existence.

"Mr. Bierre," said the Fräulein as I was going out.

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"Yes," I turned in the doorway and saw her standing in the other doorway against the carbolized sheet. At the distance her thick glasses were little pools of reflected light.

"Mr. Bierre, how *iss* Miss Marcella?"

"I don't know, Fräulein," I said. "You see, I don't see Miss Marcella any more."

"Ja, I know," she answered. She paused and her bosom seemed to heave as I had never seen it, and by the booming tremulo in her voice when she spake I knew she was trying to speak softly. "Ja, I know," she repeated. The pools of light glimmered and danced. "And I am sorry mit you, Mr. Bierre."

It was the voice of a fog-horn, but, nevertheless, those were words that nobody else has ever been kind enough to speak to me. I went back with the intention of shaking hands with the Fräulein, but she had lifted the sheet and gone and I was alone with only a very strong smell of carbolic acid.

Why my aunt wishes to have smallpox I do not know. It does not interest me inherently, and extrinsically it is, of course, none of my business. I confine myself to carrying out her wishes as far as possible. She is somewhat like an inspiration in that she must be

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accepted in the grand manner. The details of Aunt Louise are apt to bewilder the average intellect. She is a good woman. That is an article of faith with me, and as is the case with most articles of faith it is maintained by constant repetition. I repeat it every time I leave her. If I said it not I don't know what I should say instead. I suggested to Courty that he try the formula as a cure for the intense dislike he has for her. With the disconcerting docility which he has developed he has adopted the suggestion.

"How is your aunt—who is a good woman and has smallpox—to-day?" he asks me every evening as he unfolds his napkin at dinner.

"She is better, thank you, Courtland," I reply.
"The disease is of the least malignant type."

The Fräulein and I talk in very much the same manner. I would not be surprised if Aunt Louise adopted the manner in talking to herself about it. What a mystery she is, the Fräulein! To me her smile is more cryptic now than that painted on the lips of her prototype. It never changes its unexplained detachment from the mutability of things; it is almost unintelligent. But I know very much better than this.

Yesterday the Fräulein herself opened the door of

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the apartment for me. All was in darkness. She apologized.

"I haf not lid the lights," she explained. "You go indo de sitting-room, Mr. Bierre, und I vill see aboud it." And she pattered off up the hall to find the switch. I lifted the portières of the sitting-room and entered. The room seemed to be strangely still, and I stopped with that curious feeling that somebody was near me and holding his breath.

"Is there somebody here?" I asked. The perfect silence which was my only answer seemed to deepen. In the dim reflection from the windows I could make out the black forms of furniture, and there was a heavy smell of carbolic acid in the air, and nothing else except the eerie silence as of some one holding his breath. Where was Hummell; why was the place dark; what had happened?

Then from out the shadow of a bookcase next me I saw a figure moving toward the door, moving noiselessly and close to the wall. I jumped forward, seized the figure, and felt a woman's clothing.

I had my arm around her, and with my right hand I had grasped her arm between her glove and the short sleeve. The feel of this mysterious woman's flesh in

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my hand and her body under my arm in the dark was like the scent of an old familiar perfume or the sound of a half-forgotten melody. By the touch I recognized her. It was Marcella.

She broke free in that instant and I heard somebody out in the hall say, "Ach, here dis," and the light flashed on. There was Marcella, dressed in brown, holding her hat, and her other arm held up defensively, and I leaning against the bookcase. I don't think I could have lifted my hand as high as my head as she did for my life's sake.

I believe if every impression I have of the woman who used to be my wife were to pass away one by one, according to the degree of their intensity, the last which would pass away would be the impression of her gracefulness. She has very slim ankles and a very slender throat and rather wide hips and a deep bosom, and she balances like a billiard-ball, as if any impulse would send her moving evenly in any direction. She has, more than any man or woman I have ever seen, the beauty of perfect balance. She was a little frightened, and I think graceful things are most graceful when they are a little frightened.

"I came to ask for Aunt Louise, for Mrs. Grandy,"

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she hurried on, "and Hummell and I got to talking, and when you rang we didn't know what it was until I heard your voice." She paused, out of breath.

"I hope," I began, "I hope you had a pleasant talk."

"Oh, Pierre," said Marcella desperately, "don't be an idiot."

"I can't help it, Marcella," I answered, "unless I open one of the windows and let some of this damned smell out."

The room was frightfully close from the odor of that absurd sheet over the door, and I stood for a moment at the open window—long enough for a crippled taxicab to crawl out of sight behind the Cathedral. The fresh air braced me up tremendously, and when I turned I saw Marcella putting her vanity box back into her big black muff. The box had evidently done as much for her.

"I have been expecting this for a long time," I said, "but not quite in this way."

"It was an awful way," said Marcella.

"Won't you sit down?" I pushed forward a chair, but she shook her head and intimated by a gesture that she was on her way to the door.

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"I am glad Mrs. Grandy is so much better," she said. "Hummell tells me that she is out of danger." There she stopped. I suppose she realized as I did that we could not exchange inanities about a woman at whom we had laughed together a thousand times. In truth, we could not exchange anything, because we possessed too much in common. We had sat together in that room innumerable times and talked of each piece of furniture in it. There was not a habit of dress or speech or gesture used by one of us that had not been admired or criticised by the other. Recognitions of this sort were breaking between us every moment like tiny electric sparks, and each was conscious of the other's recognition. I felt her glance at my watch-chain which she had given me, and I saw her thrust her arm deeper into her muff to hide the bracelet I had given her. The vanity box I had given her too. The high, thin collar she wore was the mode I had always praised, because it emphasized the slender grace of her throat. She was as conscious of that collar about her throat as if it were a stiffness in the muscles. I felt as though I blushed when I remembered I was wearing a knitted red waistcoat she had made me. And, truly, these recognitions were only sparks from the great current

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of primal recognition that flowed from me to Marcella and from Marcella to me.

We talked, as it were, caught the sparks that leaped off from the current when they were cold, and tossed the dead black specks back and forth as words.

"I caught a glimpse of you the other day," I said faintly.

Marcella started. "Why didn't you speak?" she asked.

Why didn't I? Good Lord! I could not explain. She understood partly and tried to rush past her mistake. "I scarcely ever get to town," she hurried on, "and when I do I am always in a terrible rush. There are such a number of things to do for the family."

"How is Mr. Barton?" I asked, carefully avoiding her mistake about Aunt Louise.

"Very well. He often asks about you." She stopped and looked a little frightened.

I smiled. "Be sure to say that I asked for him," I returned.

"Yes, I will. But how *are* you, Pierre?"

"Oh, I am doing splendidly. Courty Brown is living with me, you know. We are keeping bachelor's hall up there."

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It must have been that Marcella had a vision of how Courty and I would keep any sort of hall, for she winced a little. "And how is Habliston?" she asked quickly.

She should not have mentioned Habliston. We could talk of relatives safely enough, but Habliston was our first servant. How upset he would be if he learned that he was a sentiment. "He is just as good as he used to be," I answered ruthlessly.

"Is he?" she said slowly and was silent, stroking her muff.

Our conversation suggested a man walking on knives, an unskilful man who was continually cutting himself.

"It was awfully kind of you to call here. It will please her tremendously when she hears of it."

"She is really out of danger, then?" Marcella asked.
"Hummell seems to think so."

"She never was in it," I answered.

"Everything looks like illness," said Marcella, moving toward the door. The air from the open window blew against the carbolized sheet fastened over the inner door and made it flap against the woodwork.
"That quite frightened me when I came in."

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"That," I said, "is just ridiculous. No use in the world."

"It served one purpose," she answered dryly. "But for it I should have got out by that door."

"I am very glad you didn't," I said.

"Don't talk like that, Pierre," she exclaimed.

"I mean," I explained, "it had to happen soon or late."

"Yes," she agreed. "It had to happen. It was in the nature of things, as you would say."

I would not say anything of the sort because what impressed me most about the situation was its utter unnaturalness. But I did not say so to Marcella. I asked her, instead, if she was going to Babylon that night.

"No," she answered, "I am going to stay in town for the night."

"Have you a cab here?"

"Yes. Good night."

She turned and went out by the door I held open for her with exactly the smile she used to give the last departing dinner guest before she turned to me alone together in our home.

It was exquisitely painful. It was ridiculous also, we

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two trying to pretend that the past was dead and we had buried it. "God has no power over the past," says the proverb. What could Marcella and I do with it? We had never before understood how many ties bound us. We had never before felt so completely married. Whatever may be said of divorce, it is, at any rate, an utterly inadequate institution.

VIII

IF Stewart Dewar was a toy I think I should like to break him open to see how he worked inside, as little Tommy Axson does his toys.

I fancy he is cultivating my acquaintance, for I find him constantly in my path. He telephones me at the office on comparatively trivial causes and is generally attentive at the club whenever I go there. I dined there last night and alone, and he asked if he might dine at my table.

He has the blackest hair I have ever seen on a man's head. Sometimes a woman's heavily massed coiffure gives the same impression of blue-blackness "as if cigarette smoke had been blown through it," but I never saw any other man's close-cropped hair achieve the same effect. When he crossed the dining-room to my table I noticed he was scarcely as tall as the high-backed chairs he walked between. This is partly due, I suppose, to his wretched carriage. He stoops so that a cursory glance might easily give the impression that

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his back was not straight. When, remembering this, I compare him with the other small men I know, it in itself indicates a marked personality. The other small men, without exception I think, stretch their inches to the utmost and have, in consequence, a sparrow-like erectness of carriage. A short man who stoops must have a very busy mind.

He attracts a great many people. I suppose he has what is meant by a magnetic personality. But he attracts like a magnet; what he influences only touches the outside of him. That is why I should like to break him open and see what is inside. So, in a way, he attracts me, too, I suppose. Since I can't see his interior mechanism, I enjoy watching him work from the outside; he is so perfectly adjusted to the circumstances of his existence; he works so smoothly in his particular groove. He fits into New York life as exactly and works in it with as little friction as a piston-rod in a cylinder.

"What are you going to do?" he asked me after dinner. He was drinking brandy and maraschino in his coffee.

I think if I had answered truthfully I would have said I was going to get rid of him. I answered instead that I did not know and suggested a play.

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He said they were all dull and suggested bridge in his rooms.

I accepted. I wanted to see him work, and gambling is his life's work. Bridge would only be a method of passing the time, but I thought it would be interesting to watch the motor run even if the clutch were out.

Dewar lives on the eleventh floor of the Hotel Gotham. They are magnificent rooms. There is no such sweep of space in all my house as he has in his apartment, and the view from his windows must be superb, even at night. We caught no glimpse of it, however, because the shades were carefully drawn. It seems it is against the law in New York to gamble with the shades up. We got there by a taxicab and an electric lift, and summoned Norman Vaux and a friend of Dewar's named Houston by telephone.

Houston, who was a frequent visitor to the apartment, apparently, proved rather an expert with the push-buttons, of which I think the place contains probably one hundred and fifty. He manipulated them with great skill and produced wonderful effects in light and water and hallboys. There were electric lights in the lamps, clocks, vases, and picture-frames,

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and iced water in the walls of the bedroom, bathroom, drawing-room, and library—all under the control of a push-button. He produced one effect which I do not know that he fully appreciated. He picked up Dewar's mail in the hall and threw it down on the card-table between us. It was only one letter, addressed in Marcella's handwriting. Dewar stupidly stuffed it in his pocket so hastily that I could not but understand that he recognized the hand too. Houston at this looked at me and winked.

We played until after midnight, and Dewar played well. The points were rather high and Houston, who had lost pretty consistently, grew worried, and at one time when he had lost nearly a thousand dollars and when the score was read off he showed it very plainly. Vaux, who was his partner at the time, noticed it, I saw, but Dewar apparently saw nothing. At any rate, he took advantage of his nervousness and pressed him mercilessly.

At the end he paid up with a check and left, declining supper. Dewar, to whose order the check was drawn, stood holding it in his fingers with a curious little smile for a while after the door had closed. Then he slowly tore it across and dropped it on the floor.

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"It's no earthly good, you know," he explained.

Yet he had pursued that man like an enemy.

"Why did you ask him?" said Vaux. "I don't care about playing with that sort very much, you know."

"Why, there was nobody else," said Dewar simply.

He insisted on our having supper with him, I am glad to say, because I learned that he ate bread and meat. I had rather suspected that he fed on steel filings and drank out of a Leyden jar.

I wonder what face he turns toward a woman when he loves her. I can not imagine Dewar in love. He is quite famous for his mistresses, I am told.

This I can perfectly understand, but anything more baffles my imagination. What, for instance, could he be to a woman like Marcella, who is the most primeval personality I have ever known. Would the intricate mechanism which animates him attract simplicity as a mystery or would it repel? Apparently it attracts, as she writes to him.

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I to-day had the pleasure of offering a position in my office to Mr. Lawrence Hastings, which was cheerfully rejected. He is on the immediate highroad to fortune, he told me. He has hopes of being "taken in"

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the firm which at present employs him, and as I was not prepared to take him in my partnership, he thought it best to stay where he was.

I sincerely hope it may be best. Brown, who has nothing to do with the matter, says he hopes he will starve. I tell Brown I hope he, Brown, doesn't mean what he says, which very naturally arouses Brown to resounding rage.

"This," says Brown, "comes of spending evenings with that little Gilbert girl."

He dislikes everything and everybody I like. I think he would stop drinking finally and forever if I got drunk.

"I am trying," I told him with a touch of pathos, "to put a deserving young fellow in the way of making a beautiful young girl happy, and you insinuate I am a fool."

"Not so much about the deserving young fellow," replied Brown.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked the growling old cynic.

"People don't help others to beautiful wives," said Brown, "they help themselves."

So much for philanthropy. This is the interpretation of my first efforts in the field. Confound the science!

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Not only I do not understand it, neither do other people.

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Aunt Louise is better. She is reconciled to the Health Department. They have agreed to let bygones be by-gones, either smallpox or chicken-pox, and compromised on convalescence.

I have been admitted to see her in a fresh, thoroughly disinfected room. She was sitting up in bed in a lace-trimmed pink dressing-sacque, and her hair dressed *à la guillotine*.

"Well, Pierre," she said languidly when I entered, and turned her cheek to be kissed.

"Well, Aunt Louise," I answered when I had kissed it, "it has been a close shave, hasn't it?"

She shook her head dolefully. "Don't let us talk of it," she requested.

I assented quickly and pulled up a chair to the bedside.

"Tell me what has happened while I have been lying here," she asked.

None of the sort of events which Aunt Louise referred to have happened—only wars and earthquakes and such things.

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"I hear that Marcella called to ask for me while I was ill," she went on.

"Yes," I said, "she did."

"It was very kind of her. What does she call herself now?"

"She calls herself Mrs. Vinton," I explained.

"Mrs. Pierre Etienne de Meilhac Vinton," Aunt Louise murmured. "That is a very good name."

"No," I answered. "Marcella Barton Vinton."

"Oh," she said. "She was a Miss Barton, wasn't she?"

"Yes," I said, "she was. Didn't she leave a card?"

"My dear boy," exclaimed Aunt Louise reproachfully, "I have not seen any cards."

I apologized for my mistake. It was a natural one because there was a trayful of cards at the foot of the bed.

"Pierre," she went on, "I have been thinking about you a great deal. I hope you will marry again."

I don't think I was ever so astonished in my life. I was surprised when Aunt Louise had not protested volubly against the divorce, but that she should go so far as to suggest remarriage was almost incredible.

"Haven't you ever thought about it?" she suggested,

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taking a pill-box from the stand by her bed and popping a pill into her mouth. Then she gesticulated eagerly toward the water-bottle. While she swallowed the pill I regained my self-control.

"Oh, yes, I have thought about it, but I never thought about your thinking about it."

She drew the counterpane closer about her waist and smiled affectionately, as if she was rather pleased by my discovery of her thinking powers.

"Well, I have thought about it," she continued. "In the first place, I think you owe it to your family."

"That is to you," I put in; "you are all the family I have."

"Then, I think," she continued without regarding my interruption, "I think you owe it to yourself. I am old enough and close enough to you to tell you these things."

"A young man placed as you are now," said Aunt Louise, "is very apt to form an unfortunate connection. Poor Phillippe! His life has been wrecked by such a connection. He still refuses to give the woman up. I know of half a dozen others. I used to be horrified by such things, but now I can accept them naturally. I

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remember mamma's telling us that her father (the Count de Meilhac de Berne) used to say: 'A woman can wear chastity openly like a jewel, but with a man it is hidden like the shirt of Nessus.'"

Only a chaste woman could have achieved my aunt's impression of professional detachment. A man would have spoken with hesitation or bravado. It requires, I suppose, constant reflection upon a subject to acquire this attitude of scientific impersonality toward it. Aunt Louise might have been Galileo talking about apples.

I was embarrassed, for women always embarrass me in such matters; but I nodded affirmatively and said that her grandfather must have been an uncommonly wise old fellow.

"He was," she replied. "But this is more or less by the way. My chief reason for talking to you is that I know you are going to be married by some woman, and I want you to get the proper sort this time."

"But, my dear Aunt Louise," I objected, "even admitting that I got the wrong sort last time, how can you, a good Catholic, advise me to marry when you cannot believe me free?"

She looked at me in equal surprise and said: "But,

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Pierre, as a good Catholic, I don't think you have been married at all."

This really cleared up the situation in a twinkling. In fact, the rapidity of the clearing up quite took my breath away.

"Didn't you ever know it?" she asked triumphantly.

"Of course, I knew it," I answered. Literally I answered truthfully, but in the spirit I lied like a sailor. It had never occurred to me before that Marcella and I had never been married.

Our conversation was cut short by Hummell, who brought in the masseuse and an immense number of towels, and I left. Aunt Louise bade me good-by in an absent-minded way and told me to think over what she had said.

It was a good suggestion, because what she had said was the unanimous opinion of two hundred and fifty million of other people. The unanimous opinion of two hundred and fifty million civilized people is always worth thinking about, at any rate. A verdict of such a size should not be disregarded without reflection. On the whole, there is much to be said for my aunt's point of view, and as I stood on the Buckingham's steps and looked up at the Cathedral across the street

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I said it—that it would have prevented a vast amount of bother if I had been married at Saint Patrick's instead of at Saint Stephen's.

Anyway, the theory is a very valuable addition to my collection of matrimonial hypotheses. I am rather proud of the collection, particularly so when I recall how limited my field of exploration has been. It begins with Father Witherspoon, who does not believe I have been divorced, and ends with Aunt Louise, who does not believe I have been married, and includes Lilly Axson, who believes I have been both. That is a fairly complete outline of the situation. I may fill it up somewhat, but I do not believe I can enlarge its scope.

IX

HABLSTON awoke me this morning with preternatural solemnity.

"What is it?" I asked. "If it is as bad as it looks I won't get up." I got this idea from my aunt, who never gets up unless the world is to her liking.

"It is Mr. Brown, sir."

"Where is he?"

Habliston only shook his head.

He doesn't know, neither does the club, nor the police, nor the Turkish baths, nor any of the receivers of lost spirits that go astray in city streets. He will probably return of his own accord within twenty-four hours. Knowing Courty, I can imagine an even longer absence resulting in a safe return. Meanwhile Habliston's agitation is a powerful sedative to me. His imagination is a crude, untrained force, overfed by his afternoon paper, and it hurries him from an extreme to its opposite like a tennis-ball between racquets. He does not know whether to rush out and buy a fatted calf or drag the rivers. My superior education

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permits me to imagine the return of Brown neither drowned nor hungry.

What annoys me most is that somehow the news has got out at the club as, I suppose, the results of Hablis-ton's telephone inquiries. Courty is now regarded there as a warning, a transformation, which apparently reverses all moral laws; that is, the worse his conduct as an individual member of society the greater his validity as a warning. This is, however, the point of view of the elderly element. They would unquestionably regard poor Brown's rehabilitation as a loss to the general welfare. The younger members are more sympathetic. Some of these have even backed Brown's sobriety to last a twelvemonth and were much alarmed at the rumor that it had already met shipwreck. I assured them one and all that he was safe in Fifty-third Street. If the truth ever gets out I shall probably have to resign.

.

As I expected, my inexcusable conduct in leaving Mrs. Axson unprotected at the Eastmans' has been recalled to my mind. I was imprudent enough to call on her for the purpose of expressing my contrition. She received my excuses with chilling reserve, but be-

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neath this glacial exterior I detected a tiny flame of curiosity as to why I had done it. I dexterously fanned the flame.

"What were you doing?" she asked, melting at last into curiosity when I mentioned the blood-stained shirt-front.

"I was caught by a century-plant," I explained.

Mrs. Axson shrieked with laughter.

THURSDAY

When I came in to dinner this afternoon I found Habliston talking to a housemaid in the front hall. The maid's name is Kate, a plump, red-cheeked, timid creature, whom I always see going through doors backward when I approach. She fled precipitately as I opened the door. I felt that something had happened. Habliston was nervous. He dropped my stick with a tremendous clatter and then laid it with added nervousness on the table. There, next to it, was one of the most disreputable hats I have ever seen in my life.

"Whose is that?"

"Mr. Brown's, sir."

I picked up the hat, a soft black affair that could

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probably be carried folded in the breast pocket. It was torn and green and, furthermore, the initials stamped on the band were not Brown's. I looked at Habliston and sighed, and Habliston stooped to pick up a pin. I went into the library. Courty was leaning against the mantelpiece. He looked at me without lifting his head, which is a deucedly depressing way to be looked at.

"Don't look at me in that way," I suggested. "I haven't done anything."

He straightened himself up and walked away from the fire. "It seems as if I am finished, doesn't it?"

Then he stared at me for a moment in a vacant, wild way, his lips working like a rabbit's, and came over and gripped my shoulder. "For God's sake," he said, "don't drop me."

"It's all right, Courty," I said. "I have just had a setback myself."

This is true. As Mrs. Axson puts it, Brown and I are in the same boat. His mind can be overthrown, as he says, by an accessible whiskey bottle, and mine by a yellow satin slipper.

I did not tell Brown this, however. I gave him bromide and put him to bed instead. He gave me a

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recital of his adventures of the past thirty-six hours, a dance with his devil through the lurid flame-lit caverns of the underworld, or upper Hades, Walpurgis-Nacht, on Manhattan.

"What started you, Brown," I asked.

"A rum omelet," said Brown.

Poor Brown! The gods have not had their laugh out yet. But, as a precaution, I shall speak to the cook about her omelets.

.

I detest these middle-aged women who, having outlived the power of beauty, cling to its arrogance. It is Schopenhauer, I think, who compares them to the sacred apes of Benares, that have been worshipped so long they have come to believe themselves sacred. Mrs. Gilbert is of this sort; she is a sacred ape. She was beautiful as lately as twenty-five years ago, I believe, and she is still good-looking in a sort of ripe-to-bursting style. Her hair is defiantly brown; her skin exquisitely colored, her figure only full for the most part, but she spills over mightily about her neck and chin.

She had an aged beau with her yesterday when I called at the house, whose name was Haight and who

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lived, I gathered, in Italy. He spent most of his strength urging her to visit him at Como next summer. Poor old fellow, he did not look as if he would possibly live so long, for he was half blind and all gone in the knees.

She was uncommonly civil to me. Barbara, I found, had gone to a dress rehearsal of some charitable charades, which take place to-day. Mamma in her absence was not only civil but in the lamplight much less overripe-looking than usual. I really do not see why I did not think her charming—except that there is an essential immutable hardness about even her graciousness which is repellent. She suggests a piece of marble beautifully polished by friction.

I could not help wondering as I watched her if Barbara could ever become like her; and, watching, I decided Barbara could not. Barbara's generation at its meridian will doubtless have many faults, but I do not believe that sacred apishness will be among them. The grande dame, I think, is a vanishing type. With it must go much apishness, for what is a grande dame except a very sacred simian, a sort of right reverend among the lesser clergy.

It seemed that Mrs. Gilbert could not accept the feeble little gentleman's invitation for Como until

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Mr. Gilbert had been consulted. I was about to take my leave when this came up and delayed me, because I thought it would be instructive to watch her management of Mr. Gilbert in actual operation. He is reckoned the best-trained husband in New York, a place supposed to be the first school of that sort in the world.

Mr. Haight clapped his little hands and with a bow, whereby I thought he would surely be prostrated, asked that Mr. Gilbert be sent for. I seconded him, and Mrs. Gilbert rang to find out if he had come in.

The maid who answered the bell said that Mr. Gilbert had come in, but that he was lying down in his room and had left word that he was not to be disturbed.

Mrs. Gilbert looked at us uncertainly. "The poor man! He has not been at all well lately."

Mr. Haight begged permission by a gesture and said to the maid: "Tell Mr. Gilbert, please, that Mr. Haight, Mr. *Haight* sends a thousand apologies for disturbing him, but might he speak with him on a very important matter?"

With this message, the maid left the room. The curtain is up, I thought, and I settled myself to watch a comedy.

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But this is what I saw:

The maid returned. The door was at my back, so I did not see her enter, but when I heard her voice I jumped about in my chair to look at her. It was a deferential voice, but it was frightened.

"Mrs. Gilbert," it said, "Mr. Gilbert's door is locked."

"Then knock," said her mistress.

"Please'm, I did knock, but he won't answer."

Somehow we two men looked at each other.

"You didn't knock loudly enough. He's asleep."

I saw the woman's face twitch. "Oh, Mrs. Gilbert," she cried, "you had better come. I did knock and knock and I listened, and there isn't a sound."

Mrs. Gilbert got up as we all did. "Don't be alarmed," she said coolly; "Mr. Gilbert is a sound sleeper, and this woman is a green fool from the country."

At that the maid began to sob hysterically and her mistress went out, driving the woman in front of her.

When we were left alone, Haight said: "Don't you think we had better go?"

"No," I said. "I think we had better stay."

So we waited. The house seemed perfectly quiet.

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There wasn't a sound from above. Suddenly, after a minute or two, there came a crash of splintering wood. Somebody had driven in a door.

"I am going up there," cried the little man.

But I caught his arm. "Wait. They'll call."

They didn't call. Instead, from the back the butler came running through the room, struggling into his coat.

"What's happened?" called out Haight.

"Mr. Gilbert's dead up-stairs. I'm going for the doctor."

"The telephone, you damned idiot," cried Haight. There was an instrument on a table within a yard of us. "What's the number?" and when I went out of the room they were both talking into the telephone, the butler in gasps, Haight in a high falsetto.

I went out because I remembered Barbara at the dress rehearsal.

There was a crowd of servants in the hall as I passed through, gathered about the stair's foot. Half-way up I saw Mrs. Gilbert facing them, her hands barring the passage from stair rail to wall. She was, as she had left us, in her hat. Her long white gloves dangled from her wrists. She was on guard in full uniform. Some

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great evil had befallen, but the monster of public scandal might still be defeated, so she stood there, true in the last extremity to the traditions of her code. For once in my life I almost admired Mrs. Gilbert.

I found a cab at the corner and drove to Sherry's, where I remembered Mrs. Gilbert had said the rehearsal was. I was in a hurry, for I didn't know what minute some stampeded idiot would send a telephone message to the girl. The stage was set up in a ball-room on the third floor of the restaurant, where they would not allow me to enter unless I explained my business. So I preferred to write "urgent" on a card and send it in instead. She came out very soon. She was wearing an enormous hat and was rouged and powdered for the footlights. The papers to-day say that she was to have represented Le Brun's portrait of the "Girl with the Muff." Certainly, then, as I saw her, she was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

She came into the hall holding my card in her hand and smiling a little at the underscored "urgent."

"Come in," she said, holding out her other hand.

"I haven't time," I told her. "I've a message for you from Mrs. Gilbert."

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"From mamma?"

"She wants to see you."

"To see me?" she repeated again. "Is there anything the matter?"

"Yes," I answered, "Mr. Gilbert is ill. I don't know any more. I think you had better let me take you home."

She wore heavy furs. They are part, if I remember rightly, of the Le Brun portrait. She put up her hands and touched these. "Perhaps," she said, "I'd better go as I am."

"Perhaps," I answered, and rang for the lift.

"Then he's very ill?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Just what do you know? You must tell me," she asked as we waited.

I only knew that he had been found unconscious and was so still when I left, and this I told her. I could make nothing of her expression under the hat brim and the paint and powder, but her voice trembled when she said I was very kind to come for her.

As I followed her through the crowded hall I could not help wondering how many of those who turned to stare at her startling beauty in all that make-up

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envied her. In the cab I told her exactly what I had seen, for I did not know how, in the confusion of that distraught household, the truth would be finally told her. And she listened without answering. Only at the end she asked me how I happened to be there.

“I came to see you.”

“About Laurie?” she asked and said no more.

When we got to the house a little group of three or four people were gathered about the steps and a policeman was standing on them. At this she shrank back for an instant with a curious little cry. But she got herself together again and went up the steps without faltering. The door opened before I rang, and it was Mrs. Gilbert who opened it. Over her shoulder I caught a glimpse of an empty hall.

Then I stepped back and the door closed on mother and daughter, and on what tragedy I had no idea.

It was not until I read to-day’s papers that I learned how the butler had broken down the light door of the bathroom between the two bedrooms of the husband and wife, and found his master lying dead on the floor. Yet it had all happened six feet above my head. And what else he found I shall probably never know. And so once again I am forced to admire Mrs. Gilbert, for

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that there is something more to know seems, on the face of it, probable. Is it usual for men to lie down for an hour's nap between locked doors? Is it not strange that the heart trouble that killed him was unsuspected by his most intimate friends? These are some of the questions that are being asked to-day. When they asked me I told the questioners to be patient. Mrs. Gilbert will answer them all satisfactorily in twenty-four hours.

.

The truth revealed itself to me to-day that Marcella is poor. Heretofore, I suppose, I have been unable to imagine Marcella poor while I was not. In my investigations of the relations which the divorced has severed and left intact the financial relation had not attracted my attention. I had supposed it intact. Of course it is, in reality, completely severed, the last ligament having been snipped in two by Marcella's refusal of alimony. The revelation is due to my accidental meeting with Uncle Fred at lunch this noon.

I saw his round bald head above a table by the window as soon as I entered the restaurant, and went over to sit with him. He is an ordinary enough little man, I suppose, to the vision of the world at large, with

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a round, bald head, and round, fat cheeks, and a round, little stomach, and a white mustache that sprouts parabolically, completely hiding his lips. But I can never approach him without inward quailing. He frightened me once so completely that I have never recovered. He broke my spirit once and, like a conquered horse, I have acknowledged his supremacy ever since. It seemed to me on that occasion that the clouds of Olympus veiled his brow and the thunders of Sinai echoed in his voice. I cowered before him with scarcely enough courage to ask him for Marcella, that being the object of the interview.

He is a country gentleman nowadays, and was very inquisitive about the vegetables, many of which he insisted upon inspecting before they were cooked. He told me that there was only one variety of asparagus that was fit to eat and that variety could not be bought in New York. This appeared to give him great satisfaction. I fancy I would have smiled to see anybody else with Mr. Barton's peculiar, quiet dignity inspecting a raw potato. Eating the vegetable afterward made me uncomfortable, as though I were guilty somehow of a courtesy. I don't understand why he has not been made president of something.

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I asked for Marcella.

He said she was well, and then he added decisively: "She is a very scatter-brained woman, Vinton."

"Is she?"

At that moment his own intellect was concentrated on a potato. "And she has a very scatter-brained lot of friends."

I did not answer. A short time past, no doubt, he would have added that she had a very scatter-brained husband. He then explained that Marcella was wasting her time with books, music, horses, and friends.

"Her plan now," he continued, "is to teach music."

"To do what?" I cried.

My voice must have been too loud, because he looked at me disapprovingly and replied in a whisper: "Music."

I did not accept the rebuke. In fact, I did not notice it.

"Why?" I asked stupidly.

He dismissed the subject as if it bored him. "It is just a woman's fancy," he explained.

It is, of course, nothing of the sort. The reason Marcella wishes to give music lessons is that Marcella wishes to make money. It occurs to me now that some of the sympathy I have expended on myself during

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the last six months might have been shared with Marcella. Uncle Fred's information has enabled me to see Marcella at Babylon. His hand has unwittingly torn a little rent in the veil that has hitherto hidden Uncle Fred's household, and through that rent I can see, it seems to me, into every nook and cranny of it. There is not a great deal to see; Mrs. Barton and her daughter Matilde and Matilde's Aunt Sophie and Marcella in the one spare bedroom. But my previous acquaintance with the household when it was established in Lexington Avenue makes that little tremendously significant.

I wish I could bribe somebody to marry Matilde. That would relieve the situation more effectively than any other happening I can think of. It must be gall and wormwood to the poor girl to see Marcella throw away a husband. It is to her, doubtless, a sort of insolence which if she does not resent mamma resents for her, and her Aunt Sophie too. Poor Matilde! Marcella used invariably to ask her to dinner once a week, and she as invariably accepted. Experience had no terrors for her verdant optimism. She used up a man a week, and in the third year Marcella used to give me the morning before a sort of roving commission, like a privateersman,

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to "bring home somebody." In some ways I was a successful husband. I never, if I remember rightly, returned empty-handed. Once, to be sure, it was Malory, and once it was a professional baseball player with whom I was at college. But my prize was always grown and sober. Marcella insisted upon these qualifications. I would welcome them almost on the front steps and when I ushered them into the drawing-room I was as elated as a high priest of Moloch on a feast-day. Dining Matilde was probably the most consistently successful effort of my life.

Altogether, it is not a pleasant sight I look upon through the rent. Matilde, who has suffered all this, has the bitter wormwood beneath the veneering of sweetness of the predestined spinsters; and her mother, who has always resented Marcella as an elderly duck resents having a swan forced into her brood for foster-child; and Aunt Sophie, who is simply Matilde's predecessor in the stony path of celibacy. I do not know how women torture each other in these circumstances. I have known the operation to be taking place beneath my eyes, and I have not been able to discern a single feature of it. But I know Marcella is completely at their mercy. Her only ally is six bonds. That

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is Marcella's fortune; six four-and-one-half-per-cent bonds.

And Uncle Fred defines her frantic efforts to escape as "scatter-brained." He would doubtless describe the movements of a cornered rat as "nervous." I am beginning to recover my equanimity in regard to my ex-uncle-in-law, who has such good manners and a profound knowledge of asparagus.

As I sit here writing this, in a house which her taste and labor changed from an unsightly museum of mid-Victorian relics to what it is, where some memento of her is beneath my eyes always, the penholder in my fingers as well as the paper on the walls, and as I remember her delight in it all and then picture that household down at Babylon and Marcella in the one spare bedroom, I could beat my head against these walls to be rid of the knowledge that all this luxury was weighed in the balance against me and it was found wanting.

Examining this violent impulse calmly, I find it to be for the most part vanity. The philosophic calm which impersonal analysis is supposed to induce does not, however, pervade my being. On the contrary, I feel more like beating my head against the wall than ever.

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My demon is, I think, exultingly sharpening his claws to-night. He knows that I have to spend an evening with myself. How the prospect would terrify Phillippe! I think I shall try to trick my demon and take up with Brown's instead. To accomplish this purpose, I shall have to wake Habliston, who has strict orders to lock up all forms of alcohol, and frighten him painfully into the bargain. This is one of my privileges. I may maltreat servants and drink champagne at any hour of the day or night, for I have sixty times six bonds.

Habliston has come and gone, a shivering, timid creature in a dressing-gown whom I scarcely recognized. All his dignity laid off with his coat tails. What an illustration for Ecclesiastes! What a frontispiece for "Sartor Resartus"! A butler en deshabille! He has placed the bottle, with rare discrimination, on a volume of Montaigne on the desk here, and I can think that the wine has sucked the spirit out of the book. Just so, the bitter-sweet of the nobleman's philosophy stings and exhilarates.

Phillipe is right. I am a dull dog. I realize now what a very dull dog I generally am. I perceive this now with the aid of two glasses of champagne. The perception

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does not trouble me in the least. I am, at any rate, a very brilliant, dashing dog for the time being.

There lies the power of the stuff. They are fools who say it changes the outer world to the eyes. On the contrary, the outer world shows clearer to me now, only I have the courage to look it fairly in the face and see it as it is. I look even into the glass which Marcella always kept upon the desk, and I see there a pleasant-faced fellow enough whom his tailor finds easy to fit. This, say the mystics, is a "Centre of Immensities," "A Confluence of Eternities." I smile. Surely it is the mystics and not I who have been taking wine! "What," bellows Jean Paul, "is this me, the thing that can say I?" I answer imperturbably: "It is a stock-broker."

At other times the inadequacy of the answer fills me with dismay. Now the foolishness of the question fills me with pity. I am as the gods, knowing good and evil, and not necessarily preferring the former. This passion that torments me is no mystery of the spirit. It is not beyond the skill of the surgeon or the experience of a man of pleasure. On the contrary, it is peculiarly of the flesh. Why, then, should I spend my days in such a vain longing when the world is what it is and I have sixty times six bonds? The money may not

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be able to purchase happiness, but no one denies, so far as I know, that it can unfailingly purchase satiety. Marcella made a mistake. She should have kept me and the bonds. Now she has lost both and must teach music for bread and peace. I have lost only Marcella, and, having the bonds, can buy another woman.

.

God pity me for a futile liar! I would be happier if I could buy the real woman a hairpin; I do not even dare offer her what is really hers. "In vino veritas." That's false. This calendar here on the desk, whose days are marked by her hand, the blotting-pad that no one else has used, the crumpled gloves in the table yonder, the faint perfume in the empty closet upstairs—where is the truth that can talk these arguments down?

Brown's devil lives in the nethermost pit. I have thrown the bottle in the fire, and I saw him fly up the chimney in blue flames.

X

MY Aunt Louise sent for me to-day in a state of terrific excitement. She has just returned from a tour of convalescence with Phillipé through the South. It seems that immediately on her return Miss Kate Hetherington (whom I do not know, but may the earth lie heavy on her bones!) informed her of Marcella's intent to teach music. If my aunt had learned of her intention of teaching the seven deadly sins she could not be more shocked.

"It is impossible," she said to me this afternoon at the Buckingham.

That is one of the few things it is not. It is neither wicked nor impossible. I admit it is pretty near everything else.

"You must stop it," said my aunt.

"How?" I asked.

"You must tell her that it is a reflection on you, and that inasmuch as you offered to—" and she began to enumerate the offers the Supreme Court and myself held out to Marcella until I grew weary.

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"I shall do nothing of the sort," I replied. I would rather be crushed by an avalanche of "reflections" than face Marcella with such a plea.

"Then I shall."

"If you do I shall go about drumming pupils for her."

"Pierre, are you mad?" she inquired. "Are you going to let it be said that your wife has to take scholars for bread while you enjoy a fortune?"

"You forget that she is no longer my wife." I did not add that according to my aunt she never had been.

"It is not the time to quibble," she replied. "The obligations of a gentleman are not abrogated by the decisions of a law court."

"Then," I asked, "there are still some duties between Marcella and me? I am still responsible to some degree for her welfare?"

My aunt hesitated. I think she suspected another quibble. "I don't see how you can ask such a question," was all she could say.

"It seems to me the most natural question in the world," I replied, "and yet the hardest to get answered."

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"Whom have you asked such questions?" she inquired, having a female weakness for side issues.

"Everybody, and I always get a different answer."

"I should think," she replied, "that in matters of this sort you could use your natural feelings for guide."

As a matter of fact, I had as soon use an infernal machine for a watch. "My natural feelings," I returned, "are quite out of the question."

Aunt Louise's lips tightened. She has very thin lips, and now, in her old age, when she closes them in this way her chin protrudes slightly. "It shall not go on," she said. "She has no right, bearing your name, to use it in such a way."

If Marcella had any other name Aunt Louise would not object to her taking in washing. That is why the discussion irritated me so. "If the name can get her a single pupil," I answered, "I hope she will put up an electric sign in Long Acre Square."

Aunt Louise raised her hands despairingly. "Is there nothing that is sacred to you, Pierre?"

I did not relieve her despair. She is not quite the person to whom I would open my heart.

"If you will not do anything, I shall," she continued.

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“What will you do?”

“I shall send for her and tell her what I’ve told you.”

I have reviewed what she has told me, and to save my life I cannot understand how any portion of it will have any effect upon Marcella. It will, of course, be intensely disagreeable, but I realize that I cannot prevent Aunt Louise’s being disagreeable.

“It will be quite useless,” I pointed out. “You must tell her that you are acting on your authority only and that I have no objection to her doing whatever she chooses.”

“She knows that,” she said sarcastically.

We have not parted so stiffly for years—not since the days when she used to turn me out of her room for stealing hairpins, and that was twenty-five years ago. I had a sudden impulse while I was putting on my coat in the hall to go back and make it up with her and beg her to give up the proposed interview. But to what purpose, I reflected. I could no more change my aunt’s conviction of the heinousness of Marcella’s conduct in this matter than I could alter her manner of speech. She is of one age, Marcella of the next. Between them there is the impassable gulf. Let them shriek at one another from the edges for an hour or

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so. It can do neither harm. In fact, it may possibly do one good.

Walking up-town in this philosophic mood and happening to pass the door of Mrs. Axson's hotel I turned in there.

Mrs. Axson prides herself and exasperates her relatives by her progressivism. It is as well recognized a feature of her personality as her Christian name. Having listened to my aunt's mediæval views in regard to Marcella's scheme, I felt that it would be beneficial to hear Mrs. Axson's also. So I went in and asked to see her. She sent down word that she would be delighted to see me.

I found Mrs. Axson on her sofa with a bottle of scent and a volume of Brieux's plays.

"An excellent precaution," I remarked, as I drew up my chair. "But why read Brieux at all?"

"I have a headache," she explained, but she dropped the volume on the other side of the sofa.

"I have some news," I began.

Mrs. Axson spilled an extravagant quantity of scent on a pocket-handkerchief and held the pocket-handkerchief for me to smell. "About Marcella?" she inquired.

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"How did you guess?"

She put the handkerchief up to her own nose and smiled. "Never mind," she answered; "tell me what it is."

I told her. I also told her of my interview with Aunt Louise, and the firmly progressive stand I had maintained therein.

She did not interrupt me, which was unusual, and even when I had quite finished she remained silent.

"I expected," I observed presently, "you would agree with me."

"What have you done?" she asked.

"Why, that is just the point. I haven't done anything. It is none of my business."

"Oh, I see."

I made no reply to the exclamation, although it was a distinctly disagreeable one. Lilly did not appear to expect me to do so. She looked around the room which, as I have often told her, is a very pretty room.

"It must be awful to be poor," she remarked unexpectedly.

"To Marcella, at present," I answered, "a room like this would be a cage."

"I wasn't talking about Marcella."

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"Mrs. Malory does not mind it," said I.

"I wasn't talking about Mrs. Malory, either," said Lilly.

"Well, then," I conceded, "*you*, of course, would hate it like the devil, but think how sweet would be a life of independence."

Lilly, lying on her pillows, smelled the cologne bottle and reflected. "Yes," she admitted slowly, "that would be rather jolly."

"Nobody's objections or prejudices or authority," I continued, "to amount to a——"

"To a damn. Yes, that would be a great advantage."

"To feel that between you and the world there existed no obligation except what your strength conceded to its weakness; to be able to look all human society square in the face and demand with justice the fair return of your services to it and no more; to be able to say to friend or critic: 'Take me for all in all, I am a man.' "

"But I am not."

"Not what?"

"Not a man," said Mrs. Axson.

"I was speaking generally," I explained.

"Yes, but I am not even generally a man."

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"By generally—" I began.

"You might explain all night," said Lilly, "but I remain a woman and for the present an ill woman too, and I say it must be awful to be poor when you are a woman. It may not matter to a man. Nobody cares how men live unless their wives live with them. They have holes, like rabbits, that they have come out of when we see them. We don't know where the holes are or what they do when they are in them. But a woman needs money everywhere, at home or on the street."

I did not feel that my experience allowed me to contest the statement that a woman needed money, so I said nothing.

"I suppose, of course, you don't agree with me," said Mrs. Axson.

"I agree with you perfectly."

She looked aggrieved.

"Only," I added, "I don't think your views are very progressive. I thought the modern woman cared only for independence."

Mrs. Axson had often told me so herself. In fact, some of my speech on the sweets of independence was borrowed from her and I was surprised she did not

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recognize it. "Who," I continued, venturing on plagiarism verbatim, "who would not prefer the dollar earned by labor unashamed to the thousands lavished upon caprice?"

"That's rot," said Lilly.

"You said it yourself," I cried.

"I did not."

I was silent, but with obvious politeness.

"I suppose," she continued, "you think you can make me admit anything, just because I have had a bad headache."

"I forgot the headache," I confessed.

"I wish I could," she said wearily, and passed the handkerchief across her forehead.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "talking increases it."

"No, but argument does," said Mrs. Axson.

I looked at her. She was laughing.

"Lilly," I said, "you are a humbug."

"I swear upon my heart," she said, "that I have a headache."

"That has nothing to do with it," I replied. "I came to you for sympathy and support in a course of conduct exactly in accord with your avowed beliefs and you openly turn against me."

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"I told you," she replied, "that I have a headache." I rose. "I won't trouble you again," I remarked, "on matters of importance."

"Not even when I am well?" she asked.

"Not even when you are well," I repeated. "I do not see any great difference in such matters between a woman with a headache and a woman without one."

"Then I thank God I did not marry you," said Lilly.

I did not answer. "I hope," I said, feeling for my hat, "that you will be better before the next suffrage conference."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I am going to see Mrs. Malory," I replied with my hand on the door.

"Be sure," said Mrs. Axson, "to kiss the children for me."

This was an undeserved sneer at Mrs. Malory, because I did go to see her and I did not see the children. To be sure, the floor of the library where she gave me tea was decorated with the contents of a rag doll and a Noah's ark.

Mrs. Malory's housewifely eye was on them at once. "The children have been playing here," she apologized.

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It was an unnecessary apology, however, because I did not suspect either her or Malory of playing with a Noah's ark or a rag doll. "Such things are the most cheerful sights in the world," I declared, "the true ornaments of any home."

Only the original designer of the ark and Mrs. Malory would have accepted that remark. Mrs. Malory beamed on it, however, as she picked up the sugar bowl, then suddenly her face clouded. I was puzzled, but only for a moment. "The children," I suggested, "have been playing in there too?" referring to the sugar bowl.

"I am afraid," she confessed, "that they have. Would you excuse me for a moment?"

"Don't trouble yourself about sugar," I urged. "I really prefer tea without it."

Mrs. Malory looked a little confused. "I am a little anxious," she explained, "sugar in such quantities is so bad for them."

I withdrew my protest and she fled. I spent the next fifteen minutes examining the contents of the Noah's ark. Perhaps because it was there that I had last seen Mrs. Malory, the affair reminded me of the Eastmans' ball.

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When she returned I plunged at once into the middle of things. "Mrs. Malory," I began, "I want to ask you a question."

"As many, Mr. Vinton," she replied, "as you like. We can have a long private chat until Malory comes."

"When does he come?"

"Oh, never before six," said Mrs. Malory.

I glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes of that hour.

"Perhaps," I began.

"Oh, there he is now," cried Mrs. Malory, and I heard the sound of a key in the front door.

"It was just about time, you see," she added—irrelevantly I thought.

Malory came in and shook hands with me, and kissed his wife. "Has anything happened," he inquired.

She explained about the sugar, while I returned to the contemplation of the ark.

"Have you sent for McCulloch?" I heard from Malory.

"No, dear. I did not think it necessary, and we have called him up so often unnecessarily."

"He is paid for it, isn't he?" demanded her husband, "and you don't know how much they ate."

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I rose. "Don't go," said Malory.

"I must," I replied.

"Oh, well, if you must," said Malory, leading the way to the street.

I was in the door when I heard Mrs. Malory cry: "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you."

I stopped and looked back. Malory was on the stairway, half-way to the second floor.

"Is it really true about Marcella?" Mrs. Malory asked.

"Yes," I answered, "it is really true, I am afraid."

"She is going to make her own living?" cried Mrs. Malory.

"She is going to try."

"And she will live in town, and have a little flat all to herself?"

"I suppose so," I agreed, and looked at Mrs. Malory closely. Malory had entirely disappeared. From the darkened up-stairs floated down a plaintive wail. She started.

"Yes," I added, "all to herself. What do you think of that?"

Mrs. Malory paused. In the light of the hall lamp

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her face shone. "I think," she murmured, "I think it would be the loveliest thing in the world."

Then she fled—to investigate that plaintive wail.

Inasmuch as Mrs. Malory had no headache, I consider her an even more flagrant renegade than Mrs. Axson.

XI

“POOR Gilbert! He left very little.” That is not gossip; it is an epitaph.

The truth is he died a bankrupt, and the Hudson Trust Company will pay his debts. But truth is such an awkward thing to handle; it is easier to stick to epitaphs. It is easier to believe that he left the house in Madison Avenue and a small income than to believe them both gifts of the Hudson Trust Company, and that is the way everybody is handling the situation at present.

I have seen Barbara once since the afternoon of the rehearsal, a far-off, black-robed figure in a pageant. She was, I believe, much fonder of her father than of the other parent, and, besides, he was the Atlas of her world. Mrs. Gilbert may have ruled the house, but he was the pillar that held up her universe. Now the pillar has fallen, and I am afraid her everything has come crushing down to ruin, along with it, Laurie Hastings as much as anything else.

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When such a thing as this happens I cannot be surprised that women are getting tired of such insecurity and want some support more stable than these very mortal Atlases to rest their universes upon. The arrangement is pretty enough, even splendid at times, while they are running about in motors, jewelled and furred, silken clad and exquisitely scented. It has always seemed to me particularly pretty and charming when I have seen them here in New York at luncheon in the up-town cafés, and compared those gay, pretty scenes with some feeding establishments below Fourteenth Street, where their Atlases were doubtless at the same hours filling their stomachs. But, pshaw ! it is only a gambler's luxury. They never know where the end is. A quarrel, an illness, a prettier face—one of a hundred such little happenings may take it away in a week. How can they be ever truly happy on such frail foundations ?

Yes, I have the deepest sympathy with the protests of these sisters and wives of the rich, and I can perfectly understand how they feel that society is unjustly a man-devised organization. The complaints of the humbler sisters seem to me quite artificial by comparison.

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This, I suppose, "lets me out" as a philanthropist. Well, no matter, I was getting tired of the rôle anyway.

"Old, unhappy, far-off things, and battles long ago."

Marcella has a bad temper. I had almost forgot that of late; it was brought to my mind this afternoon, down at Babylon, by Marcella herself. She talked to me by telephone in the office yesterday.

"This," announced a muffled, creaking sound, "is Marcella."

I kicked the door of my private office closed and answered: "Oh! How are you?"

"I want to talk to you," she went on. "Can I see you to-day?"

"Of course."

"Where?"

I was a little confused. In the first place, I haven't the gift of the telephone, and I had not, moreover, recovered from the surprise of talking to her at all. I answered as a child repeats a well-learned "Fouquard's at five." Marcella agreed and there ended our conversation.

I have not been in Fouquard's tea shop in Forty-

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third Street since I was married. I can recall perfectly the last time I was in it. Marcella and I were having tea at a little marble-topped table with iron legs that stood in the corner farthest from the corner at which the orchestra of three pieces plays every afternoon. The walls of Fouquard's are lined with mirrors in very cheap gilt frames, and Marcella was reflected at almost every angle. She was nibbling a brioche; I was gnawing a bun.

"Marcella," I said, "I am going to tell your Uncle Fred."

I did not finish that bun, and I have never tasted one since. The heroism of that determination lifted me forever beyond buns. Marcella too put down her brioche—not finally, however; she still retains her fondness for them—and said "Whe-e-e-u" as nearly as I can remember.

Even that did not daunt me, and I did tell Uncle Fred, and the next time Marcella and I had tea together we had it brazenly at Sherry's, just around the corner. Before that time, however, we were well-known customers at Fouquard's. The hideous dame du comptoir bowed to us, and the waiters had even got to understand Marcella's French, which was of the pains-

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takingly incorrect sort disseminated at a neighboring day-school.

Yesterday afternoon I once more presented myself to the hideous dame du comptoir. She knew me and smiled as of old, and the waiter who showed me to a seat knew me also. I ordered tea and brioche rolls and buns and lit a cigarette. The waiter brought the tea and the bread and let it stand awhile. I lit other cigarettes and waited, but Marcella never came. Fouquard's is not for married people. It is fly-specked and tawdry, and its clientèle is, I suspect, pretty nearly disreputable.

Presently I gave up hope and went out. The waiter who had brought me the tea stopped as I was nearing the door.

"Did you not see mam'selle?" he asked in a tone of surprise.

I shook my head.

"She was here ten minutes ago. Here, right here," and he pointed to the dame du comptoir. Then I saw that he was telling the truth, that Marcella had come and gone away again. I did not blame her. I was anxious to go away again myself.

I met Goadbye as I was coming out of Fouquard's.

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He was coming out of a garage next door. He gave me a knowing smile as he passed. I had been in rather a hurry to get away from the office, and I suppose Goadby had no doubt that I was conducting some disreputable intrigue with Fouquard's for a tryst. I wonder what he would have said if I had told him that I had been keeping an assignation with my wife and had been disappointed into the bargain.

The disappointment did not have any serious material results, because Marcella sent me a note by a messenger asking me to come to Babylon this afternoon on a matter of "great importance." The note did not give any explanation of her failure to meet me at Fouquard's, although it must have been written very shortly after the hour of that appointment—an omission for which I admire Marcella. I doubt, moreover, if she could have explained it on paper. I am quite sure I could not.

I went down to Babylon on the 3.15 train. Marcella met me with a piebald pony whose legs made me shudder and a diminutive wicker cart of the sort in which governesses air their charges about the streets of New England summer resorts. Marcella sat in one corner and I diagonally opposite, and we filled it un-

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comfortably full. She wore an old weather-stained polo coat which made me in city clothes feel vulgarly overdressed as I climbed in beside it.

"I had a letter this morning from your aunt, Mrs. Grandy," she began as we drove across the tracks toward the open country.

"You are lucky," I observed. "You came very near having a visit from her."

Marcella shook the reins. "Then you knew what was in the letter." She lashed the pony. "I thought you did." She lashed the pony again. "I suppose you asked her to write it." She put the pony to a gallop. "Why don't you write your own letter? Why did you get your aunt——?"

I couldn't hear any more, because the cart was making a fearful row and I was holding tightly to the side to save myself from being thrown out, and just as we were rounding a curve of the road she burst out crying and dropped the reins to get her pocket-handkerchief. If that pony had possessed as much as one sound leg I believe the interview would have ended there. Perhaps that would have been the best way out of it. At the time I could think of no other and I sat in my corner waiting for the catastrophe and Marcella

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sat in hers mopping the tears with the pocket-handkerchief.

"Stop him," she sobbed out.

"I can't," I answered.

"Whoa," said Marcella with a sob.

The pony subsided gradually to a walk and she put away the pocket-handkerchief and took up the reins. Her style of driving is startlingly suggestive. When things are going to the deuce at a run she drops the reins and takes her pocket-handkerchief; when they have returned to an orderly progression she resumes the reins.

"Did you know what was in the letter?" she asked, temporarily forgetting the charge that I had dictated it.

I shook my head.

She pulled out a letter from somewhere beneath the weather-stained polo coat, and held it out to me. I took it and tore it in two and dropped the pieces over the edge of the pony cart.

"That doesn't do any good," she remarked.

"And it doesn't do any more harm, either."

"She said that I was putting a stigma on you."

I recognized the accuracy of Marcella's paraphrase; stigma is a favorite word with Aunt Louise.

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"Then she added," Marcella continued, "that I probably didn't know it."

"Well, of course, you hadn't and you didn't," I observed.

"I don't understand."

I did not quite understand myself, and I saw a morass of further misunderstanding immediately before us.

"Marcella," I said, "it is perfectly useless for you and me to try to understand each other through the medium of my aunt, isn't it?"

She nodded and whipped up the pony.

"I don't care a bawbee about stigmas. But I know—" I stopped.

"Know what?" asked Marcella.

"That you have a right to part of everything I have and that you are very silly not to take it."

"I had a right," said Marcella, "but I refused. Now I haven't a right any longer. That's the law."

"I am not talking about the law."

"What else is there for you and I to talk about?"

I, sitting in my corner of the pony cart and Marcella in hers, looked each into the other's eyes. Marcella's

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turned away first. "I think you are talking like a beast," she said bitterly.

"I have not said anything."

"I'll substitute 'ungentlemanly' then."

I laughed. "You sound like Aunt Louise."

For the first time, her face, which had been quite colorless, flushed; she turned again and looked ahead.

I felt a sudden desire to make her cry. "Ungentlemanly," I repeated, "is that all? I presume you did not marry me because I was a gentleman."

Marcella turned. "I married you for money," she said.

I perceived then that Marcella was trying to make me cry.

"That's not true," I returned. "You could not help marrying me. You would have married me if I had not had a penny in the world."

She turned on me again. I saw I had failed in my attempt to make her cry, but I had succeeded in making her very angry.

"At any rate," she retorted, "I recovered my senses fairly soon."

"Senses? Do you call it sense to do what you did? To make yourself unhappy and me—" I paused.

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"Make you what?" she asked quickly. Then as quickly she recovered herself. "Aren't you taking a good deal for granted when you say I am unhappy?"

"If you were happy you would not want to leave and go and make your own living."

"I have no right to ask my uncle to support me."

"You have no right to ask that of any man except me," I replied.

"And I have no need to ask it of you. Women nowadays don't have to beg for support. I have no need to ask help of any man."

"You don't have to ask it of me, Marcella," I reminded her. "It is yours already. You only have to use it."

"It was mine," she corrected, "when I—loved you. But it isn't now, because I don't."

It was marvellously lucid. But still, as the pony jogged along, I sat still and tried to understand. Marcella also sat still and stared ahead up the road.

"Might it not be as well," I suggested at length, "to turn? There is nothing more to say, and I believe there is a four-thirty back to town."

"Yes," she assented, "there is a four-thirty," and

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she pulled the pony up short. "Do you understand?" she asked.

"Perfectly."

"You would not want me to go on living as though I loved you—to lie to you."

As a matter of fact, to have Marcella at this table now, with an arm across my shoulders, lying her damnedest would suit me perfectly, but in the pony cart I agreed glibly.

"There was nothing else for me to do," she went on.

"No," I agreed; "nothing. But really we had best turn. The four-thirty——"

Marcella turned with abruptness. "There is nothing vital about the four-thirty. At the worst, there is the five-thirty."

I murmured something about a dinner engagement. I suppose the average husband understands when his wife divorces him that she has, temporarily, at any rate, ceased to be passionately in love with him. But the fact held a certain surprise for me even this afternoon. We jogged along the road to Babylon in silence. I have never ridden in a vehicle that was so sickeningly uncomfortable. I suppose governesses and children can stand anything. Once Marcella looked back at me

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and I tried to smile amiably in return, but she paid no heed and turned again. We might as well have been married, I reflected.

We crossed the tracks again and drew up at the same end of the platform where I had got in. I rose, but Marcella motioned to me to sit down again.

"Just a moment," she explained.

"There is no hurry."

"I don't think," she began, "that Mrs. Grandy had any right to send me that letter. It was impertinent, really, but the world is full of impertinent people, and I suppose——"

She paused and sat still.

"And I suppose," she continued, "that they will all think she did quite right."

"Possibly," I rejoined; "which doesn't matter to you or me in the slightest possible degree."

"Oh, yes, it does."

I shook my head. "It should not," I insisted.

"But it does," said Marcella. "It does and it always will. So I sent for you to tell you that I am not going to teach music." And she put down the whip and held out her hand.

I was surprised, but to a much greater degree I was

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interested. "You are not going to do this thing," I asked, "because of some possible effect upon me?"

Marcella drew herself up. "I wouldn't," she began.

"Don't," I begged. "I understand, only what are you going to do?"

"Go on living here."

"But you can't. You are unhappy."

"There comes the four-thirty," said Marcella, and I heard the toot of a distant steam-engine. "You have to get in on the other side."

I climbed out and stood looking over the edge of the pony cart. Marcella's manner in regard to the four-thirty was decisive. I understood that the five-thirty had become impossible. It may have been imagination, but she looked very lonely and unhappy, and—this was probably due to the polo coat—she looked poor too. She was all this, I reflected, because she could not completely get rid of me. She, I, and the law had each done all it could, and still Marcella's life and mine remained entangled. We have broken, cut, and hacked away every tie we can get, and still we are not free.

I did not tell her good-by. It would have been ridiculous under the circumstances. I turned away without saying anything, and got on the four-thirty on the

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wrong side. If I had cared truly more for Marcella's welfare than my own I would, of course, have got under it instead of on it, and so out of her way forever.

There was, doubtless, as the common saying runs, a great deal of truth in what Marcella said, but there was undoubtedly a great deal of mortification as well, and unfortunately the truth was for the benefit of society at large, while the other was exclusively reserved for me. I had that reflection as company on the four-thirty. Vulgarly put, I had been well whipped and then thrown a bone if I happened to care for it. And, as a matter of fact, I happened not to care for it at all. I did not care a pin's worth for the world's opinion of me in regard to my divorced wife's earning a living, and I had distinctly and even rudely said as much to both sides in the dispute. In consequence, the sides had united in blaming all their grievances on me. I was to blame for allowing my wife to earn a living. I was to blame for thrusting my self-interest upon a woman who had publicly proclaimed that she wished to have nothing to do with me. Mrs. Grandy I could forgive; she was only a fool. Mrs. Vinton knew better. She knew that I wished only her happiness and was endeavoring to do no more than secure it. She had de-

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liberately made use of the other's folly to make of me a fool. I felt I could not forgive Marcella. Her conduct was spiteful; it was mean; it was intensely feminine, perhaps, but it was thoroughly unwomanly.

To think so of Marcella was to revolutionize my manner of thinking. It was her superiority to these qualities of meanness and pettiness that had placed her above all other women. A chaotic condition of mental affairs ensued if the truth was otherwise. If she was this, then what was I? I was standing by the stern rail of the Long Island ferry-boat looking down at the black water, for it had got dark on my way up on the four-thirty. All the lights on the river were aflame, and the great bridges hung outlined in dots of fire. It was the hour for the rush from Manhattan, and the returning boats were almost empty. There was nobody at the stern except me, and a woman dressed in black and thickly veiled whom I had once glanced at and then forgot. Suddenly I heard a voice ask: "Who are you talking to?"

It was the woman in black who had come behind me unnoticed. It was very dark out there, and I was taken quite by surprise, and she was heavily veiled, wherefore I entirely failed to recognize her at first.

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"I suppose," she went on, "you feel like asking the same question?" And she lifted the veil that hung from her hat brim. Then I saw Barbara Gilbert. "You were cursing some one. Who was it?"

"Myself, naturally," I answered.

She leaned over the rail beside me and looked at the great shining arc of the new bridge. "When I come into New York from this side at night," she said, "I don't feel big enough even to be cursed."

"That is the case," I answered, "when you think of yourself as a rational being. I was regarding myself as a jackass; whereupon I loomed big enough——"

"Don't," she interrupted, "talk of jackasses out here."

I had never thought of the view of the East River from the back end of a ferry-boat as inspiring, but somehow, as she spoke, I felt as though I had been vulgar.

"I have been looking forward to this all afternoon," she went on. "I have been at my aunt's, at Oyster Bay, on business, talking," she gave a queer little shudder, "of money. And all the while I was really thinking of coming out here on the way back and getting clean. When I first saw somebody else here

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too I felt insulted," she added, "until I recognized you."

It was the first time I had spoken to her since I had driven her home on the night of her father's death. That was less than a month ago. I was thinking of this and of the great change in her since then, natural enough perhaps, but puzzling when felt for this time. As if she read something of my thoughts, she said: "You were very kind to me. I never thanked you, I never can, but I felt it."

Then, as if she wished to turn from that altogether, she asked me, while I murmured some reply: "Tell me why you were so displeased with yourself."

"Oh," I answered, "a lifelong list of reasons. How is Laurie?"

I heard a little laugh, and she looked at me as composedly as before. "Laurie and I are quite out," she answered.

"Good Lord," I exclaimed, "and you don't mind any more than that?"

"Not really. At least, I think not. You see things got too thick for Laurie and me. I mean circumstances got too big; they sort of threw us in the shade."

"I don't see," I said. "To be honest, I don't see."

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"Well then, I don't think I can explain. He understands and I understand, but I doubt if either of us could put it into words."

"Perhaps," I said, "I do see a glimmer now."

"We thought," she explained, "at such a time each would mean a great deal to the other, and we found out that neither mattered at all."

"So," I reflected, "another occupation's gone."

"What did you say?" asked Barbara.

"I was wondering," I answered, "what I was going to do next."

"It's my turn not to understand," she said.

"And I can't explain," I answered.

"You are full of mysteries," said Barbara.

"It's the place," I suggested. "So Laurie is gone. I'm sorry."

"You needn't be," she replied, "certainly not for me, and I don't think for him, either. He was very nice about it all and said he was heart-broken, but I knew he wasn't and he knew I knew it. So there you are. Laurie isn't built for rough weather, and neither am I, I am afraid."

There was a deeper touch of seriousness about her last words that made me look at her. "I hope you will never find it," I said.

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"What is the sense of hoping," she answered, "when it's already here?"

While she spoke the boat's speed slackened, and we heard the rush of water as the engines reversed. She began to rearrange her veil. "I hate to go off," she said.

"Don't," I suggested. "We can stay where we are for a return trip."

She had moved out a little from the rail and was standing in the light from the cabin doors, so that I could see her clearly for the first time. I thought she was rather more beautiful in black than ever.

"I don't believe," she cried, "anything could be sillier; but if you will I should love it."

We moved a little toward what would now be the bow of the boat so as to get out of the coming crowd.

"It will be colder out here," she suggested, and she insisted that I put on the coat I was carrying on my arm. Presently they came, the crowd, pouring through the cabin and hemmed us in our corner.

"It'll be all right again going back," I predicted.

"I don't mind as it is," she replied, looking overboard. "You need never know they are there."

Perhaps she did not, but I did; and I enjoyed the

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knowledge of their presence. Individually, perhaps, I did not feel attracted, but en masse they warmed me with a sense of sympathy and common humanity, these hard-toiling men and women going home after a day's labor. I liked the feel of them close around me. And I envied them. Ah, in the very core of my soul was envy. I too was going home, but after such a day and to such a home. They perhaps envied me, but that was their folly. Mine was a dearly bought wisdom. Among them I felt of them in spirit, but separated by injustice. I too had worked, and was willing, God knows, to work again for their reward. In my fine clothes I felt among them like an alien, an outcast, robbed and homeless.

Presently Barbara looked up at me as if a little puzzled by my silence. "Please," she said impatiently, "please button your coat. The wind here is very keen."

I had put on the coat obediently enough, but apparently had neglected to fasten it. I did so now in an absent-minded way. Suddenly she gave a little exclamation of impatience and pushing away my hands fastened it herself.

She was half laughing up at me as her fingers were busy about my throat.

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“You need somebody to take care of you,” she said.

“Will you take the job?” I asked.

She turned away and looked over the side again.

“How neatly put!” she exclaimed.

“I mean it, Barbara,” I said.

There were probably a dozen people listening. I knew it, but I did not care; neither did Barbara.

“Don’t ask me why,” she answered, “but I can’t.”

Then the boat slipped smoothly into her moorings, and the crowd surged around us preventing speech. We stood there with our backs to the outgoing and then incoming passengers, and neither of us said a word. Presently, when all was quiet again, she began to speak. “You mustn’t think I don’t mean this. I do. I have thought of it before. You haven’t, I suppose, but I have. You see, I must marry now, and I have thought—well, to tell the truth—I have thought of pretty nearly everybody, but of you among the first. Then mamma has thought of it too.” She laughed. “You guessed that, didn’t you?”

“It seems,” I answered, “that every circumstance favors except the man.”

“No,” she said quickly, “it’s not the man. It’s a woman.”

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"What woman?"

"Where are you coming from?" she asked.

Then, of course, I understood. Perhaps I understood the better of the two.

We had got out of the slip now and were gliding smoothly through the dark water.

"You do understand, don't you, that I am not thinking of anybody else who might answer differently? Perhaps I am not thinking at all. I just feel that way. I always have. I don't blame anybody who feels differently. Only, I can't myself. Do you know what I mean?"

Again I felt that I knew what she meant a great deal better than she knew it. I only said half of this, and for fear she should guess the other half in her queer woman's way I said: "You needn't worry about that anybody else. There won't be anybody else. If, after this, another person should make a different answer, look at it from another point of view. I should regret having asked the question. So you see there is no possible chance of my asking it."

And in this, certainly, I spoke from the deep of the heart. This was the end of such matters for me, and I knew it and said it.

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As a matter of honest fact, I suppose I knew it before. Only the crowd was too much for me. Democracy is the spirit of cities. When we are in the mob we think as the mob, we feel as the mob, we want what the mob wants. Henceforth I must avoid such company; the clay pot must keep away from the brass ones. For I cannot have what the mob wants and gets. In it, nevertheless I am not of it, but a man of a different kind. Indeed, not a whole man. And that other part of me, that which wants a wife and a home with children and the quiet end of a day's work, should be put decently away, not dragged awkwardly through the world any longer. Yes, that part had best be put an end to, and with it these overscrawled pages which, after all, are only the record of its post-mortem antics.

BOOK II

I

IT was how many months ago I dined with Mrs. Axson in her little Wedgwood dining-room, which is so extraordinarily becoming to her? This is October; that was April. It was that many months ago.

We dined alone, for we had affairs of business to discuss. The maid who served spoke only French, so we were quite alone. Generally Mrs. Axson's dinners are attractive rather than sustaining, but then the menu was aldermanic. Further, we had Burgundy and brandy, which I am sure had been given her, for no woman, except possibly a washerwoman, would spend so much money on brandy.

I was to advise her about the purchase of some bonds, but it seemed impossible to begin such a subject. We fought shy of it unmistakably. I was quite sure that my advice was not half so good as the dinner, and she had a reason of her own. She looked very charming in pale yellow, and was inexpressibly fragrant. Her pink finger-tips on the white cloth epitomized the sugges-

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tion of her toilet. It seemed to me that she had bathed in milk and her clothes had lain in rose-leaves. We talked of very old days in the country, when we used to race horses together on the soft country roads about Westbury and go swimming together in a singularly informal manner.

"They were soft roads then," I recalled, "and no motors, praised be Heaven!"

"And it is lucky they were soft too," said Lilly, "or we would have broken half a dozen necks apiece. Do you remember?"

I did remember once very distinctly—Lilly, a little bunch of brown habit in the brown dust and a brown pony browsing peacefully on the ditch side.

"I have the mark of that fall now," she told me, and held up one round white arm and vowed it was crooked, had been for all these years.

"How I used to adore you then, Pierre!"

I felt alarmed. It had never occurred to me before.

Lilly nodded, and I thought she blushed just a little. "Yes, I did; and when you went off to Saint Mark's, do you remember, I hoped you were going to kiss me and you didn't. I remember I cried."

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"But how about the next spring when I wanted to kiss you and you would not let me? Do you remember?"

"Oh, yes, but I was in love with the Holworthy boy then."

I felt a dislike of Holworthy and tried to remember who he was. It was queer, though, I had never suspected Lilly's passion. Still it titillated the vanity of the present hour very perceptibly, as it was, and I felt grateful to her for confessing. I felt a little gauche, too, in not insinuating something of the sort on my part. One always likes such confessions to be reciprocal.

The Burgundy tickled my imagination deliciously. Lilly began to recall other things, some of which I had shamefully forgotten. I confessed the lapses too sometimes, and sometimes there were long pauses, and the musical sound of the French clock in the drawing-room beyond was clearly audible in the Wedgwood dining-room. And sometimes, in those pauses, I was not thinking of the past at all but of the present and what would it be like if I had not forgotten to kiss Lilly good-by when I went to Saint Mark's and there had been no Holworthy boy or anybody like him and this was my Wedgwood dining-room. The slim little

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maid moved about without disturbing at all those pleasant dreams.

"And do you recollect the summer in the Thousand Islands? Let me see, I was sixteen then and you were nineteen. Oh, what a summer! After all, there is something about sixteen."

And I recalled too a boat race of that summer which Lilly and I had lost disgracefully by hours, lying becalmed that long out on the river, and how we crept in before an almost impalpable breeze just at dusk. We had not gone to the house then; we had sat on the dock.

The pale gold of Mrs. Axson's little head glimmered a moment, as she leaned to straighten a candle.

"Oh, yes, I remember."

We had said things on that dock.

"I wonder," I mused, "why I remember these things so clearly."

"Perhaps you have said them so often since," she explained.

"Perhaps," I agreed.

"Of course," said Lilly.

"No. Not 'of course,' only 'perhaps.' "

There was a very long pause, and the French clock

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ticked loudly in the drawing-room. The maid came in with coffee and went out again.

"And then you went abroad," I said suddenly.

"Yes. Then I went abroad."

She met Axson abroad, and was married there.

Lilly got up. "When you finish your coffee come into the drawing-room. I must take a peep at Tom."

Although I did not hear a sound she was already in the drawing-room when I got there, sitting with her feet tucked up on a chaise-longue. She was looking down at the clear little fire. She looked up as I entered with the half-absent smile of one aroused from pleasant thoughts.

She took a cigarette from my case, leaned back among the cushions, and smoked brightly.

"How sentimental we were!" she said.

"How is Tom?" I asked.

"Sound," she answered.

"You came back very noiselessly."

"I didn't want to interrupt your coffee. I am proud of my coffee." Then she poured out a glass of brandy from the liqueur stand at her elbow and held it up toward me. "I am proud of this too."

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"You see you are an honored guest, M'sieu. And now"—she settled her body among the cushions—"and now the bonds."

I have seldom forgot anything so completely as those bonds.

"Dear me," said Lilly. "Forgot 'em! All this fatted calf for nothing?"

"The original fatted calf was not killed for bonds," I answered.

"What was it killed for, then?"

"For—well, let's say for Auld Lang Syne."

"Well, at any rate, it was bought for bonds."

I disputed even this. Sitting on the edge of the chaise-longue, it seemed to me that bonds were not very apropos. I was thinking of what awaited me when I left the room and its delicate charm, of Brown sprawling on a sofa asleep, surrounded by crumpled newspaper and tobacco smoke, in place of Mrs. Axson. The withered, parched craving in me for the delicacy, the daintiness of intimate womanhood grew green again in my soul, as I put my hands on the back of the lounge and bent over her. I felt deliciously refreshed, as if I had entered into a flower shop from a crowded street.

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She moved imperceptibly and raised her arm, and I found I was looking across it into her eyes.

"Why do you do this?" she asked very quietly.

"What a very silly question!" I answered.

"No. It isn't silly." She took both my hands in hers and held them in front of me. "Because I have something to tell you." She paused, and the little glass clock on the mantel began to chime.

"What is it?" I asked. "Is it bad news or good?"

"Ah! That I don't know." She paused again. The little clock ceased. And as the last note ended she said: "Peter, Marcella is going to be married."

Presently I felt my hands released, and next Lilly was standing beside me by the mantel.

"You didn't know it then," she was saying.

"Of course, I didn't know it."

"She wrote me yesterday. I imagine it is rather sudden."

"Yes, rather," I answered. "Who is the other person?"

"Stewart Dewar, of course. Didn't you know?"

Then I had a strange feeling that I had known for a long time, that it had all happened many years ago, only I couldn't precisely remember when. It confused

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me. There were so many other things I wanted to think of and could not because of that obsession. Lilly's voice speaking to me sounded queer.

"Pierre, go and get your hat and take a walk."

And I obeyed like a child. While I was in the hall, looking for my things, I heard her call me. I looked in the door; she was still standing as I had left her.

"Pierre," she said, "you haven't told me that you enjoyed the evening."

I told her something and went away.

I was in the hands of horror when I left that place. Marriage is a horrible thing to a man if he loves the woman he has married. It is many other things as well, and all of them beautiful; but always, to a lover, it is horrible too. Perhaps one reason may be that thereby a fundamental lie of human life is displayed naked before his eyes. That is always horrible. To me the preservation of that falsehood as an immaculate truth has been a principle of existence, and now I was told I must share my secret with another man. I felt how much easier it would have been to take her life than to share her so. Such an act appeared to me heroic by the contrast, sublime, the true apotheosis of love. Ah! sometimes I wonder whether if women could read

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men's minds the mystery of themselves would ever be quite so marvellous again.

I am quite aware that physical jealousy is a fair diagnosis of my emotional state when I left the Clinton. But that is only a name, and one of my symptoms was a disgust with names. I was feeling, not thinking, and names to me then were of no earthly use. I threw them off, as I walked down the dark street, and bade my mind go naked and unfed. Names had been its food and clothing long enough. I gave it instead the strong drink of pure emotion. So, in reality, I was drunk, but gifted with that strange lucidity of thought which often gleams through the chaos of a drunkard's brain. Almost, as if in the actual delirium of alcohol, I had conceived of the world I live in as overrun with animals, driven wild with appetites whose causes, purposes, even satisfactions they were ignorant of, the kennel of a raving pack. I could fairly see it, a vast plain in a dim light and the black, uncouth shapes writhing and falling—and I irresistibly driven on by the supreme appetite.

I stood on a New York street corner, and felt lay hold of me the oldest fever in the world, that despair of life itself which first peopled the air with demons

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and undermined the earth with hell. In such chaos, what hope was there except in the sharpest tooth? Was there any?

Looking back now, I see that figure standing on a New York street corner in a very detached and impersonal way, a distraught man standing in a world overthrown into total darkness and given over to the spirits thereof. A tragic figure, a human being in honest doubt of a divine law in the universe. Now, a very little thing had sufficed to work this ruin, merely the knowledge that a woman who had belonged to him could belong to somebody else. That does not certainly seem a sufficient cause for such disaster. Men, surely, should have their lives more firmly based if they would deserve the name of man. Very true, perhaps; very fine sounding, certainly; but the naked truth is all men are in the last analysis as this man was. Every man's life has just so narrow a pediment as his. Have I not known men when even the lack of a drug would deliver them over to a very material hell, and others to whom a loss of dollars meant the extinction of the universe? At this detached and impersonal view-point I do not find this figure so contemptible or in any way weaker than his fellows. Indeed, it seems

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to me rather that this man's plight was of a nobler kind than most, and that he who bases life upon love of a woman builds boldly.

It must have been an appreciable length of time I stood there so. I awoke. The delirium or whatever it was had passed. Instead, I was looking down a long, black street like a tunnel with a flare of light at the end. The light, I recognized, streamed from the entrance to a theatre and beneath was a passing throng of men and women. I felt as if I had somehow dropped into this world from some other and, giddy from the fall, I put out my hand and touched the cold, hard stone of a great building. Somebody was walking toward me down the dark street and the flick-flack of footfalls echoed between the houses. Little by little, through such sensations, the perceptions of reality came to me. This was, the other had been delirium.

But not always. Once that delirium had been reality and this world of mine a dream. Suddenly a greater light broke through a greater darkness. If this was, and the other madness, if those distant black shapes were men and women and not the animals I had seen, if this had been evolved from the other, then there must be an eternal equity. I did not follow the thought or

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question the principle. Its mere existence there in the dark with the other so close by was enough. I have heard Broadway called many bad names, but I looked at it as Paradise.

What followed was perhaps natural for a man who had reached this state of emotional excitement. What I wished to do, what I felt I had to do, was to account to myself for this horror which had seized upon me at the thought of this marriage. It was not balked appetite, for I had voluntarily surrendered the gratification of that and had proved that I was capable of perfecting the sacrifice. I may have failed as a husband, but in divorce I was impeccable. My honest self-consciousness was without reproach there. It may have been jealousy. It is easy enough to give the mystery a name and throw it aside; but for my part I could not get rid of it so. No; it was none of these. It was not lust; it was not jealousy. It was something in no way related to such things; something quite different, of a higher nature, of vastly greater power. What was it? As I slowly walked on the answer came, the triumphant consciousness awoke in me that I had somehow become an instrument of that law which stretched from Broadway to the beasts, and incalculably farther,

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that I was in my horror an infinitesimal means to its vast mysterious purpose.

I remember only one sensation of my life like that—swimming off the Rhode Island coast far out, too far out I was beginning to fear, and suddenly feeling under my feet the lift of a comber rushing shoreward. The feel of that big breaker, as if there was the whole might of the ocean behind it shoving me irresistibly forward, faster and faster, headlong toward firm ground! I felt it again.

Those are rare moments in a man's life when he feels all the energies of his consciousness pull together to one purpose. I felt it now. I had surrendered, as it were, my will-power, given myself over to another power outside of myself, which I believed to be right and knew to be irresistible. My duty was only to fulfil its decrees. This marriage was a thing abhorrent, not to me but to the force of which I was a manifestation, and to prevent it was only to fulfil the law of my existence, the law that stretched from Broadway to the beasts.

Yes. That was fanaticism. I recognize it now. Though I did not then.

It was still early, far short of midnight, but I had

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got pretty far down-town I discovered by looking at a street sign. I was at Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue. I found a cab a few blocks away in front of the Café Lafayette; drove up-town to the club on the chance that I would find Dewar there. I did not. He had not been there that evening, the man at the door told me. He was not at his apartment but was thought to be in the country, they told me there.

As I was turning away from the desk at the Gotham a party of women passed me coming in from the street. They had evidently been to a theatre. One of them seemed to know me and bowed. As I stood there undetermined what to do I overheard a half dozen words of their conversation while they waited for the lift. They thought I was drunk and were whispering about the pity of it. It was not an unnatural mistake, for when I glanced in a mirror I saw a dishevelled, horrid-looking individual, somewhat resembling me. The sight made me realize the ridiculousness of my hot haste. And I drove straight home.

II

DEWAR'S office windows look down on old Trinity churchyard, and as I stood at one of them next morning I could not help reflecting that there was a certain similarity between us, old Trinity and me. It was early and Dewar was in one room with a stenographer and the morning mail, so I was waiting—outside in the board room. We were both supporters of creeds called outworn and certainly temporarily neglected. Dewar's mail must have been voluminous, for I waited a long while. And meanwhile I felt a great sympathy for the little brown church in its long, patient vigil down below. Behind me the market was just opening, and the whir of the ticker was unbroken. I heard a voice announce that if steel opened below sixty illimitable disaster would result, and the clock in the tower struck ten. I felt somehow as if it were a greeting from old Trinity to another old fogy.

Presently Dewar's door opened and his stenographer appeared with an armful of papers. I went in.

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The office was a small room and as bare as a cell. There were three telephones on a flat-topped desk, a ticker in the corner next to it, and two chairs, but not a pen or a pencil or a scrap of paper except what the stenographer took out with her when she finally left us. Dewar greeted me curtly enough, but I was conscious immediately that he was puzzled by my visit. He wore a business manner which, of course, he would never have assumed for a business interview. I almost expected him to say: "What can I do for *you*?" He stopped barely short of it. Actually he made some comment on the stock-market, letting the ticker tape run through his fingers.

"It is breaking pretty quickly," he began.

"Yes," I said. He seemed absorbed in the quotations until I was seated.

"Well," he said presently, "what's up?"

"I have come on a purely personal matter," I explained. "Will we be uninterrupted?"

"Oh, quite. Go ahead. What is it?"

"I was told last night that you were going to marry Mrs. Vinton. Is it true?"

"Yes," he answered. "Only we didn't intend it to get out so soon."

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"Oh, it isn't out," I answered. "You see you can scarcely describe me as 'out.' "

"Quite so," he smiled. "But, you understand, no further."

"No, certainly, no further by all means. In fact," I added, "that is what I wanted to see you about—its getting this far."

He drew in cautiously and turned from the desk so as to face me. "I don't quite understand," he said.

The constant repetition of "quite" made me nervous. I thought I had best be as exact as possible. "I mean this," I explained. "I am going to prevent its going any further, prevent the marriage. Do you understand?"

He jumped out of his chair. "Oh, tommy-rot, I haven't time to listen to it."

I rose too. "It's no matter. I have said all that is necessary. I thought it only fair to tell you beforehand."

"Well, I tell you," he broke out, "that if you are joking, you have a damned queer humor. And if not you are crazy. You might as well warn me of your intention to drink up the East River."

"Honestly, Dewar, you behave as if nobody had ever talked to you seriously before in your life. I am

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completely sane, only I am completely serious. I am going to prevent the marriage, and I'll tell you exactly by what means."

"Thanks," he put in, "that would be interesting."

"Naturally I have some influence over her, and I have, if I care to use it, absolute control over you. We will leave her out of it. Take your case first. The surest method of prevention would be to throw you through that window. That is where my control over you begins. I am able to throw you through it. Next, I can threaten to do it. That is the second zone of influence, because you know I am able to do it. The third step is to convince you that I am quite willing to do it. That is what I have come here to do."

Dewar is such a pitiful little creature. I had never imagined he had any vanity about his body, but when I said that I saw he had. He flushed up like a little boy, and his eyes quivered. I almost felt sorry for him. It is queer that you can be at once quite prepared to break a man's neck and yet be averse to hurting his feelings.

"I am not pretending that I can frighten you," I went on. "Only I want you to understand exactly what sort of game you are up against. Now, believe

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me, man, because I mean what I say. Before Almighty God, I mean every word of it."

He was not afraid, either. I liked his not trying to bluff about his weakness, keen as his mortification was.

"You seem to overlook one thing," he answered quietly. "There is such a thing as the law."

"Yes," I answered, "but unfortunately the law is only for punishment. It doesn't prevent."

"Don't you know that I could have you locked up for what you have already said?"

"It is not impossible," I agreed. "Nevertheless, you won't. Ring for an officer. Have me charged with threatening to thrash you, break your neck, throw you through the window, assault, anything of the sort. Why, I'll make you so ridiculous you couldn't marry your own chambermaid."

The sneer must have cut terribly. He lost all control instantly, and with it he lost all force too. He fairly gibbered. Every minute I expected an interruption from outside. They could scarcely have failed to hear. "You threaten me, do you?" he bawled. "You can throw me out of a window? Well, what if you can? I don't scare that way. And the law is impotent, is it? You will see just how much truth there is in that boast.

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I have got you nailed there, for I am going to marry her, and if any damned lunatic tries to interfere I will be married with the officers of the law at the altar-rail."

"Don't," I advised, "Marcella might marry the policeman. She certainly would not marry you."

He jumped up and came at me as if he were going to commit assault. "Marcella, Marcella," he gibed, "what right have you to call her Marcella?"

What right had I? Good God! I looked at his face so close to me, at his twisted lips, and just then the thought flashed in my mind that those lips had kissed hers, would kiss again and again—and something came between us and I struck at them, as I would stamp on a snake.

I struck him only with my open hand, but he tripped backward over his chair and went head over heels into the corner. And he lay there, where he had fallen, perfectly quiet.

He was not hurt. I do not believe that he was frightened, either, but I do believe he was stunned by astonishment. It was probably the first time in his life he ever felt a blow. Blows were things he had heard of, knew existed, of course, probably had seen, but certainly believed as remote from his world as Sirius.

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To be struck by a man must have been as startling to him as to be struck by a meteor. He got up presently to my great relief and took out his handkerchief and began to dab at a little cut on his chin, made by my glove button. I felt sorry for him again and looked away and, happening to look down at old Trinity, felt ashamed of myself.

He said not a word but stood there looking at me, and dabbing at his chin with a pocket-handkerchief.

I felt like a fool. It was a ridiculous situation, and I had made it so. I had quarrelled with a man over a woman. Truly, an archaic proceeding. Nowadays men don't quarrel over women, they quarrel with them. My place was at Babylon. By coming here I pretended that a woman was a piece of property and her possession a matter of title, which was obviously absurd, especially so in this case. In sober truth Dewar and I might as profitably have quarrelled over real estate in the moon. It was possible that finally I might have to fulfil my threats to the last syllable, but until then the matter lay between the woman and me. And now, bound by some shred of an ancient code, I had come down here and made an ass of myself.

"Well, Dewar," I said at length, "I shouldn't have

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struck you. I did not come here to do that. Something you said then got under my skin."

"Yes," he answered curiously, "I know."

"Of course I do not retract anything I have said, but I am sorry I struck you. That was absolutely useless."

He nodded and kept on dabbing at his chin.

There seemed to be no shadow of resentment in him. Apparently he was rather shaken, for he sat down weakly in the visitors' chair. But he never took his eyes from me and he did not speak.

"You are not hurt?" I asked. "That is only a little scratch on the chin, isn't it?"

He looked down at his handkerchief, just flecked with red, and replied: "Oh, yes, only a scratch."

As I had told him, I could not very well offer to shake hands, and I had nothing to add and nothing to retract from what I had said; for me the interview was ended. And yet I couldn't go. I distinctly felt that he did not expect me to go. So I stood waiting.

Presently he asked me in a still weak voice: "Did you ever want to kill a man?"

"Why?"

"Because, I do."

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"I suppose that is perfectly natural under the circumstances," I answered vaguely.

"No. It isn't. Not for me. It's terribly queer for me. I have never felt anything like it in my life. When you said something of the sort just now, I didn't understand. I sincerely thought you were crazy. Now I understand, and I believe you perfectly."

"That is what I came to do," I answered. "To make you understand."

"Well," he said, "you have succeeded perfectly."

Those were our last words. When I closed the door he was still sitting in the chair with his handkerchief to his chin.

III

I HAVE no clear recollection of any plan or motive in going immediately down to Babylon. I believe that I had none. Otherwise, surely I would have telephoned and found out beforehand the uselessness of the trip. The same senseless craving for action made me choose to go down by motor rather than by train. I could not endure, I felt, the inactivity of the train. So I telephoned for a car from Frizzell's, which met me at the Bridge, and drove down myself. From the village I telephoned to the Bartons' house and found that Marcella was in New York. The servant who talked did not know where, and could not find out except that she definitely would not be home for luncheon and probably would for dinner.

I came out of the drug store where the telephone was and looked helplessly up and down the familiar street. What to do next was my thought. The thought was answered by the chauffeur in the car at the curb, who suggested that he wanted lunch. The homely good

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sense of the want made me laugh at my own self. What was my haste? What had I to tell Marcella that could not wait? What had I to tell her, anyway? I had no answer. The chauffeur, thinking I was laughing at him, got mad meanwhile and kept muttering something about flesh and blood and three o'clock.

So I pacified him, and we lunched together at a delicatessen shop across the street. He was a good-tempered creature when properly fed and told me wild tales of parties he had driven to and from on that same Long Island with all the nastiest details put in in a whisper.

He ate unreasonably, too, and when we finally got away, found the main street blocked by the railroad gates. Two trains, up and down, arrived simultaneously. We were on the side of the up train, which pulled out last. As it cleared the crossing, it gave me a view of the opposite platform. I saw Marcella standing there. She was looking about her as if she half expected to be met, and as my car came into full view and she saw me, she started and turned toward one of the ramshackle cabs gathered about the place.

I got out and went over to her.

"I have come down to see you," I said. "I have

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something to tell you.” Even then I did not know what.

“Can you tell me here?” she asked.

“No, not here,” and I waited while she scrutinized me.

“Then we had best go to the house. There is nobody at home.”

I drove and Marcella sat alone in the tonneau, and sat, I felt, very straight up, too. In the driving seat I repeated what I was going to tell her.

As we drove up to the gate she leaned forward and spoke: “Drive around to the stables; I see somebody’s car in front.” So I turned and we got out back of the stables. I caught that chauffeur’s narrow eyes watching us, summing us up as we walked off toward the garden.

“I have seen Mrs. Axson,” I said.

“Yes. She told me so to-day.”

“Oh! That’s where you were. I thought so.”

“I have also seen Stewart Dewar,” I went on.

“On—on purpose?” she asked quickly.

I nodded.

She stopped and made me face her there on the walk between two hedges. “What did you have to say to him?” she demanded.

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And as I looked at her there I thought how I loved her, and how I must always love her, and how she was Marcella, my Marcella, my wife, my sweetheart. I understood for the first time how a man can strike a woman. Something queer probably showed in my face, for she dropped a parcel she carried and laid both hands on my arm. "What have you done?" she asked. "Tell me, Pierre. Pierre, what have you done?"

"Done to him," I answered, "nothing. But what have you done?"

"Done to him?" she questioned. "What do you mean?"

"No. To me."

She dropped her hands and drew back. "To you?" she said. "What have I to do with you?"

There it was again: the appeal to cool reason in the futile turmoil of emotions, like the chauffeur's appeal for lunch; and again it sobered me.

"Will you let me tell you," I answered, "what you have to do with me?"

And before she answered I picked up that parcel and led the way to a board seat nailed to a pear-tree—a bench that was in the garden, when I first entered it.

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"I can't imagine what all this means," she exclaimed.

"If you will listen I shall explain. In the first place, I fell in love with you when I was a boy. I have always loved you ever since."

She half rose, as if to protest. But I put my hands on her shoulders and pushed her back. "You have got to listen, and, moreover, you have got to believe."

She was a little frightened and looked hurriedly about over that ill-kept old garden with its weed-grown paths and untrimmed trees and rotten palings. "I have always loved you. I loved you when you married me and when you left me, and I think I loved you more when you left me than when I married. But I let you go. That was criminally wrong. I thought it was right. I had listened to too much dribble about Feminists, I suppose. I believed it unfair to keep a woman to her bargain against her will. So I let you go."

"I suppose now," she broke in, "you believe it right to keep her to that bargain against her will."

"That isn't my problem any more," I said. "I bitterly regret letting you go, and I believe I did wrong. I am as much as you and my needs are as great. And my need of you was greater than your need of freedom.

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I sacrificed a greater to a less. That is always wrong, and between you and me it was such a wrong I call it a crime. It took from me all happiness, and it has not brought you any."

"I not happy?" she rose. "I am a thousand times _____"

"If you were, you would never think of marrying Stewart Dewar," I interrupted.

As soon as I spoke I knew I was right. Marcella is not clever at duplicity, and I have known her and loved her for nearly fifteen years. She played very well. She insulted me endlessly. She even wept, but I never doubted. Once she tried to rush past me, but I caught her and pushed her back on the seat.

"When he kissed you, you thought of me and blushed," I told her.

She twisted about to face me. "You are indecent," she almost hissed.

"Yes. It is all indecent," I cried back at her.

She seemed a little quieted by my heat. "Is that all you have to say to me?" she asked.

"No; it is only the beginning. I let you go because I believed that you had the right to freedom. I thought that our marriage was a sham if you had ceased to

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love me. It seemed to me that to bind you to me because of a document rotting in dust in a never-opened vault or to claim your life forfeit because of words spoken in the presence of a priest was a degradation of human life. I still believe it—more faithfully now since I have learned how many other miseries are due to such mildewed paper, or *sacrosanct formulæ*."

Marcella was looking up at me, standing before, with blazing eyes. As I met their glance I hesitated and stopped. I could not say to her what I meant to say that way.

"Well?" she questioned impatiently.

"Well," I went on, "so much for documents and *formulæ*. But, Marcella, when we were married, when you first told me you would—do you remember? It wasn't very far from here—and that day when we drove off from this house together and that night when you slept in my arms, were we thinking of documents or of *formulæ*? Did either of us think then that we owed our happiness to those things? They were always, then as afterward, trash which we never thought of. Our marriage then was something infinitely more sacred than any priest and more binding than any document could make it."

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"Yes. But then I loved you," she broke in.

"Yes. You—you—you—I am not thinking of you, I am thinking of myself—I have never ceased to love you. What of that? I have broken the ties of priest and pieces of paper easily enough. And because I have done that, you claim to believe that I have broken all ties that held between us. It is you who are inconsistent. How can those formulæ mean nothing in the marriage and everything in the divorce? What happened to them to make them grow so, and what happened to my love for you which made the marriage binding, that it had no part in the divorce? If it was all-important in one, how did it become negligible in the second?"

"But you surrendered these rights. You gave them up."

"I did not," I answered. "because I could not. Before Almighty God, what made me your husband on our wedding night is in my soul now."

She rose, shaking, a little frightened. "But I am free. Free," she repeated, putting out her hands in appeal.

Never before in her whole life had she asked me for something and been refused. I could not have refused her then, only as she spoke I thought of Dewar and

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those hateful lips I struck. Then I knew that I could never give her this.

"If you believe," I answered, "that marriage is a formula muttered by a priest, if you believe it is the desire of one meeting the convenience of the other, you are free. If you can strip your womanhood naked, cut down your life to the bare mechanistic principle, you are free. But if you can't, you must listen to what I say."

"And what you say is—? I am listening."

"That this thing which happened between us was not of your doing only, but partly, also, of mine; that you may—I give you every right—that you may take from it all that is yours, all that you put into it, but that you cannot touch my part. You may leave me; I have not held you. You may withhold from me every privilege a wife grants a husband; I ask none of these from you, but further you cannot go. I admit that you are entitled to every freedom I can give, but you are not entitled to freedom from my loving you, because I can't give you that."

"That means, I suppose," she added, "marrying again? Then I answer that what you ask is not only injustice, it is insanity."

"It may be insanity," I answered. "Yes, it may be

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that, but it is certainly not injustice. After all, I only forbid you to commit adultery."

She got up, flaming red. "You have forgotten that even a wife should not be insulted."

"Would you blame any woman," I asked, "who left a marriage when she found she had been deceived, and that her husband's love was a lie. Wouldn't you say that such a marriage was a sham and bound no more than the law, which could be abrogated, bound? Then why is not divorce similarly effective? Both are mere matters of formulæ, depending for their human validity on human love. If I cannot be truly married to you without love, I cannot be divorced from you with it."

"I think I am going a little mad," she said. "I can't believe that you are speaking what I seem to hear." She laid her palms against her cheeks and turned away from me to look across the marshes toward the distant blue glimmer of the sea. "Yes. I think I am a little mad, too."

"No, my dear, not mad, only beginning to understand," I said to myself, and I sat down and began to smoke, watching her standing still at the tree trunk, looking out into the distance.

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What a kaleidoscope life is! Here were Marcella and I in that old weed-grown garden at Babylon, where she and I had loved so. What an infinite number of shapes and colors life had formed since then! And now, back again, the same garden and Marcella and I, and I pleading with her not to strike me the foulest blow a woman can give a man. I know well of what she was thinking while she stood so silent. She was trying, just as I had tried, to scare away the memories, to strip her girlhood to its skeleton, to get life down, as I had told her, to the mechanistic principle. And she was going to fail, as I had failed, as everybody, perhaps, fails once or twice in a lifetime.

She turned then and looked at me.

"So you love me?" she said.

"Yes," I answered.

"You must believe this, then," she went on; "I have ceased to love you. At first, for a little while, I missed you, thought of you at least frequently, wanted you, perhaps, sometimes. Now I don't do that. You are a part of my life that is dead; quite dead forever. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Does it make any difference?" she asked.

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"No. If there is ever any difference, I shall tell you?"

"Yes. I believe that you will," she said. "And you must believe this: I don't love you, but I believe in your love for me. I don't deserve it, I don't even want it. But I value it, and I don't think I could ever do anything to hurt it. I didn't think anything of this sort when you came in here. But you know it now. I can never hurt it. It is like a little child, I can never hurt it."

"That is what I meant, Marcella," I said.

"Is it? I don't know. Only I can't hurt it."

We stood looking at each other so for a moment. She put out her hand. "Good-by."

Then suddenly she put both hands against the rough bark of the pear-tree and leaned her face against them. I saw the tears creep through her fingers.

I did not wait. I knew she would not want me to see her cry. I went away then.

The chauffeur was asleep in the car when I got there. He had been asleep all the time. I awoke him and drove slowly back to New York.

IV

I SUPPOSE men will always change their skies in search of new thoughts—as I did now. In truth, at that time my thoughts needed a change pretty badly, for, as I lay sleepless through that night after my trip to Babylon, they became rather desperate and despairing. The situation was so obviously impossible as it stood, and as I had brought it there it was quite as obviously my part to find a solution. That was not very hard to find—the elimination of Pierre Vinton at once from all earthly situations forever.

That is a very radical conclusion for a man under any circumstances to be brought to, and besides frightening me badly it shocked me, too. I do not believe in radicalism. Life, if properly treated, will generally yield to compromise. I had no instinct for the Wertherian heroics. Such heroes, besides everything else, it seems to me, generally in the end turn out to be silly. I can excuse a man's self-extinction only in case of an utter exhaustion of the will after a long struggle

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or else extreme ennui. Neither was my condition. Indeed, my will had never been so intensely excited and I was further from ennui than at any time in several years. But, on the other hand, how else could I relieve a woman of the burden of my continued existence, inasmuch as I had deliberately fastened it like a pack upon her shoulders? I lay for hours in the dark with that problem for my company, and for once, at any rate, I could find no compromise to fit it.

At length, just as the morning was showing gray about the windows, the hope came that if I got away I might get a different angle of vision. It is a confused reason but a very ancient faith. I went down in the dim light to the library, where yesterday's newspapers still littered the floor, and finding that the *Kronprinzessin Cecilie* sailed that evening at nine o'clock for Cherbourg and Bremen, I decided to sail on board her.

There were a great many affairs of detail that might have delayed me if I had not thought of handing over all of them into the hands of Courtland Brown. The simple matter of an attorneyship, and I was free of mundane worry, and Courtland Brown equipped once more to take a fall out of the world. I prided myself greatly on this master-stroke of rehabilitation. Courty's

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comment was that it seemed to be a pretty large order. He needed a large order; anything else would have been a temptation, as I explained to him. So I left him shackled to good behavior more securely than a convict.

He drove to the dock with me, he and Habliston. I saw them last under one of the big arc-lights of the pier, looking for me along the steamer's rail. When Brown caught sight of me, he raised one clinched fist above his head and shook it in the air. I found a note from Habliston saying that there were woollen under-clothes at the bottom of a leather trunk. I left two good things behind me—a good servant and a good friend.

On landing at Cherbourg I went directly to Paris, for the reason that every one from the boat did so. There was no one on board whom I knew, and I had made no acquaintances, but I had formed the habit of seeing these faces, and to lose sight of them would have been a useless jar. So they melted away imperceptibly until I took formal leave of the last one, a fat little haberdasher from Denver, and left him standing speechless on a Paris sidewalk, one of the loneliest figures I have ever seen.

Phillipe I believed to be in Normandy, but I fancied

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he might return unexpectedly and I did not wish to go anywhere I might meet him. He is one of those clear-thinking souls, so offensive to the melancholy. So are all Frenchmen. So especially is Paris. The melancholy love vagueness, shadows, mists, semi-obscurity. Paris does not know such things. It is her mission to bring light into the world. I have never cared for Paris at any time, but I loathed the city then. The only melancholy that French can tolerate is that of reflection. The melancholy of emotion is incomprehensible to them. To think life is a poor farce is the rôle of a philosopher, but not to laugh at it is an inexcusable bêtise. It is a very gallant philosophy, too, but I was not in the humor for it at the time.

It was during these days that I learned the difference between the loneliness of solitude, which is fear, and the loneliness of the multitude, which is despair. At night I felt one, and all the day the other. I stayed at a little gray hotel in the Rue Castiglione, where I knew no one, and spent my time in art galleries, museums, theatres, restaurants. I frequently saw familiar faces and I always avoided them. However Americanized Paris may have become, still no particular American is expected, and when he is seen there is always

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an incredulous moment when he may, if he wishes, make an escape. I used innumerable moments so. I had a curious dislike of hearing of New York. I felt it was a complete disassociation of ideas I needed, and in the crowds I diligently preserved my solitude.

I sought earnestly for the new angle of view I had come away to find. I did not find it. Once, however, I imagined I caught a glimpse of it. It was at Enghien, whither I had gone for dinner. Afterward I went into the baccarat rooms. It was not exciting. Gambling sometimes is when it is a passion, but it is generally disgusting as a pastime. Some men worship the great goddess Chance and observe scrupulously every detail of her rituals—black cats, bent pins, Fridays, lucky numbers, and all the rest of it. I respect such devout souls, but who can respect the devotion of a partner at a whist table? There were no devout souls at the tables. Every one was playing listlessly and stingily. I found a seat at a table of Chemin de Fer, and for a time played as listlessly and stingily as any of them, winning for the most part, and at last in disgust threw down the handful of gold pieces I had slowly accumulated and played the whole on my own hand. I won. The table grew a little more animated when I played

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the double amount on the second hand. When I staked that also and won I became a hero, an unsuspected favorite of the goddess. Sparks of the true gaming spirit flashed about. There was approximately fifteen hundred francs in front of me. I played it and won; played and won again. I risked the whole, something more than a thousand dollars, and lost. But the table had lost courage by then probably, for the croupier pushed over to me a double handful of gold.

As I took the money I heard my left-hand neighbor murmur in French: "A run of six. My God!"

She was a glorious, full-lipped, deep-bosomed woman, and I imagine she had never looked better than at that moment, for, evidently a novice at gambling, she was thrilled by the fascination of it. She had splendid big brown eyes, all afire now, and her lips just parted showed the gleam of her teeth and the tiny tip of her tongue. She smiled frankly back when I caught her glance and said, pointing to a gold piece: "That is mine. I scratched it for good luck."

I told her in that case I should keep it.

She said politely that I was very kind and added: "And it was my last one, too." Then she glanced sadly across to where the cards were.

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So I understood that just for the gold I had in my hand she was mine. That was the new angle. I had only to throw the money in her lap and tell her to follow me, and I was thenceforth a burden upon no woman in the world. The necessity that bound me was snapped like sewing thread.

The idea was not new, but it had a new force now; the beauty of the woman. She was beautiful, and I was bored. She was poor, and I was rich. Surely there were many compromises to be made with life of those four elements. In the end I decided there were, and I gave her the money and went back to Paris alone. There was no reason in this, and there was no morality, either. Perhaps there was only obstinacy.

In the end this little adventure led me away from Paris. After it I saw the counterpart of that woman everywhere. She became for me the visible expression of all that Paris had left to offer me since I had refused her true great gift. First a philosophy I had no taste for, then a woman I did not wish to buy: I felt that Paris had behaved stingily toward me.

Disgusted with Paris, I despaired of all cities and went to Vevey. One year, many years ago, I went to school at Vevey, and I had always remembered a

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certain schoolmaster with reverence. Perhaps—but my master was dead, and even the desks were new. They showed me his tomb. Perhaps the living man would have been as inarticulate to my needs as the stone that covered him. Still, I remembered him as an unceasing spring of knowledge, and I went away like a man who has barely failed to grasp some longed-for prize.

Switzerland is an incomparable place to be alone in. After Paris, I appreciated it. I rested there and spent more than a week idling about on the shores of the lake around Vevey. Later, at Lucerne, the Nemesis of the post overtook me and I found the accumulated mail. I read the first two letters, glanced at a few more, and then, being on the bridge, I heaved the whole parcel of letters overboard into the lake. As they fell they attracted an innumerable flock of ducks waiting below for bread, who fell on them and then scattered in all directions. One large black pirate I saw sailing off, bearing in his beak an envelope I recognized as Lilly Axson's with an air of inexpressible triumph.

How I disliked a postage stamp! To me the marvels of the post were the tentacles of a gigantic octopus in whose clutches I struggled vainly for release. Now, a glance at a letter had brought back to me New York

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and the realization that in all essential ways I was precisely where I had started. It was a beautiful spring day. Under my feet were the sparkling waters of the lake, above me the glittering summits of the Alps.

I have no reason to believe that I am more life-loving than the common run of men, but I have never committed the stupidity of despising it. I wished to lay aside my garment of the years decently and with respect, not tear it loose like a boy at bedtime. I had nothing to do with mails. They could neither help me nor hinder me. The high, white summits met more the needs of my spirit. I threw the letters to the ducks and went up into the mountains.

That night, looking out from a window in Engleberg, I saw the moon shining down on the great white head of Titlis.

It is a benign and venerable summit. As I looked up to it I felt suddenly the desire to climb up to it, too. It was a desire easily enough fulfilled. Next morning, by inquiries at the office, I found that two parties were starting that afternoon for the summit and I decided to go with them. The clerk at first was very insistent that I take a guide, and he spoke a great deal of bad English anent the dangers to the inexperienced. But I

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especially did not wish a guide. I wished, above all things, to be alone, and even if there should be an accident, what of it? Accident might be well met. To the clerk I pointed out a family party—a German father and two daughters—starting out alone, and as one of the daughters was certainly not over fifteen, he gave it up and let me pay my bill in peace. I started, therefore, on the next afternoon with only a boy from the hotel to show me the way across the meadows to the foot of the tortuous path up the preliminary climb. The family party had started an hour before and was already out of sight; just ahead of me was a huge Englishman, with a black-bearded German guide. The Englishman had been pointed out to me as Lord Bathurst Kerr, a famous cragsman, now bound across country for Interlaken, and the Jungfrau. I followed this couple up the interminable zigzags in a fine mist that soaked me to the skin. All of us slept that night at the little Tribsee Inn, wrapped in mist and rain—the Englishman, the German family party, and a solitary German, who had come from some hinterland, in a pair of long-toed patent-leather dancing shoes.

It was clear next morning, however, and I set out under a pale-gray sky with just enough light to make

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lanterns unnecessary. The Englishman was ahead as before, but the Germans, who had lingered over breakfast, I had this time behind me. It was a very easy climb even for such a green hand as myself, and I would have enjoyed it if I had not looked back and seen that the Germans—for he of the dancing shoes had joined the family party—were rapidly gaining on me. There was something mortifying about being overtaken by two schoolgirls and a man who wore such shoes on the Alps, and I changed the leisurely climb into a race. The older daughter, who had red hair, for some reason took off her hat as soon as we reached the snow, and this shining oriflamme drove me up and on at a killing pace. I won. I think I even gained a little on them, but as I was in very bad shape to begin with, this exertion in the thin air did me up pretty badly. When I got to the top I was thoroughly beat.

The big Englishman, who was sitting on the snow munching a roll, looked me over slowly as I sat down, and without speaking tossed me a brandy flask. I declined with thanks and tossed it back. He put it in his pocket without a word and went on with his breakfast. The silence of his much-loved solitudes had got into that man's soul. The Germans trooped past

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us and settled themselves on the farthest corner of the tiny plateau. The Briton never lifted his eyes from his bread, and we representatives of three nations sat, each in a different corner, and exchanged not a word among us. The Germans talked a little among themselves, the Englishman spoke rarely and in monosyllables to his servant. I lay on a rubber coat and talked to myself. In the great depths some strange black birds circled slowly and silently around. As I lay there, feeling as if I were in an island above a stormy sea of crags and snow, I wondered less and less at the Englishman's habit of silence.

He was the first to move. As he stood up and fastened the knapsack across his tremendous shoulders, bent as if muscle-bound, he asked me which descent I intended to make. I told him I was bound for the Engstlen Alp.

"I pass it," he said. "Some bad spots. Keep me in sight."

I thanked him and said I would, and I watched him go swinging down the snow slope, handling his big stick as rhythmically as a drum-major. When he was a few hundred feet below I started to follow.

The descent was easy, and, relieved of my pursuers,

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I took my ease. Half the time the couple below me were hidden from my sight, and my solitude was complete. It was a boundless panorama, constantly spread below my eyes—a vast white, glistening emptiness. Such solitudes either break men's spirits or mend them. It mended mine. The little street-bred stock-broker had glimpses of higher things. I began to descend more quickly. Only when two black spots below reappeared and seemed too near, I stopped altogether, and let them draw ahead and get out of sight again. At the bad spots I increased my speed, but there was no deliberate purpose in my mind, only an invitation, as it were, to the whim of chance. It seemed to me such a splendid opportunity for chance.

At length the unbroken snow my path had followed from the summit came to an end. The trail of my guides turned at right angles and crossed a ledge of rock, led to another snow slope beyond. This ledge was about a foot and a half wide, and fifty feet or more in length. Crossing it was like walking on the top of a stone wall, an old stone wall of crumbling mortar and loose stones. On the left was a drop of a hundred feet or less to snow. On the right the fall was sheer for a thousand feet. As I stepped onto it I knew I had found what I had come

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to find. That little platform of rock was the "ultimate island of my destiny."

I stepped out quickly. A pebble slipped beneath my foot. It had to be an accident, or it had best not be at all. Then a wild uprush of chaos, a sudden stab of pain. And that was all.



COURTLAND BROWN had been left in New York with authority to do as he thought fit with his trust, and advised not to expect any communications of any sort. He received none until the cablegram from Bathurst Kerr. This was directed to the firm of Vinton, Bragg, and Goadby, and contained a succinct account of the accident on Titlis. A man carrying in his knapsack the papers of Pierre Vinton had met with the accident and was lying at the Engstlen Alp with a fractured skull and other injuries in a very critical condition. The writer was awaiting instructions *care* Thomas Cook at Interlaken. It was signed Bathurst Kerr. Goadby received it and telephoned Brown, who came to the office. Together they sent a reply, promising fuller instructions to follow immediately. Then Brown put the cable in his pocket and took it to Babylon.

It was early when he got there, and Marcella, who

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had not been well, was still in bed. The colonel was on the lawn superintending the transplanting of a tree when Brown drove up from the station. He knew Brown vaguely.

"You can't see her," he said when Brown asked for Marcella. "She's ill."

"I've got to see her. Vinton's dying!" said Brown.

"Dying!" said the colonel.

Brown gave him the cablegram.

The old gentleman read it and started indoors with the paper in his hand.

"For God's sake, man, don't give it to her like that."

He sat down helplessly on the steps. He still held the spade in his left hand. "You take it to her. I'm beat. I liked that boy."

They finally sent for Marcella by a maid. But the woman, after the mysterious manner of servants, had caught the spirit of the crisis and her message brought Marcella in a dressing-gown to the stair top. When she caught sight of Brown, she called to him and he came up-stairs into the sitting-room. Marcella closed the door and stood with her back to it.

"Well, what is it?"

"It's Vinton," said Brown.

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"Of course. But what of him? What's happened?"
Brown handed her the cable.

She read it for a long time, said nothing, stood looking at it as if she were reading it and rereading it, again and again.

Suddenly she put out both hands toward him. Brown had always hated her. He stepped back.

"What was he doing on that mountain alone?" she asked.

"God knows," said Brown.

"Yes," said Marcella, "God knows, and me."

She put out her hands to him again. "Help me," she prayed. "He helped you. Help me to get to him."

He did help her wonderfully, and only four hours later he bade her good-by at a gang-plank of the French Line. All the way in from Long Island in the motor she had not said one word, and her eyes had been very dry. She knew he hated her and why. But she had imagined he was going with her, and when he started overboard for the pier, she broke down. He caught her in his arms, and the colonel and he carried her to a chair. She lifted her veil then, and he saw how her face had changed, and his heart changed at the sight.

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"Tell me," she asked him then, "when he left you, did he hate me, too?"

"Marcella," he answered, "I know that if his eyes are open when you get to him he will live."

This much I can piece together from Brown's letter and her.

There was a little English clergyman on the *Touraine* that voyage coming home from the Canadian Northwest. Before that he had been a tutor to two boys in Switzerland. He must have been a clergyman of the simple-thinking, clean-lived sort that we like best to call "parson," and he was drawn to Marcella by the curious instinct his sort possess in all genuine sorrow. He knew, apparently, every peak in Switzerland; knew Titlis well; had climbed it twice. There was no spot on it, he told her, where an able-bodied man could come to harm. To prove his statement he described a part of the climb. It must have been an accident of an unusual kind, he thought, incomprehensible to him. Marcella, lying in her chair, listened and said nothing.

At last, because it had grown unbearably comprehensible to her, she told him the whole story and what she feared, and he, in hot remorse for what he had done, but unable to retract a word, refused to leave her

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and turned his back on England, after ten years' exile, so that he might hand her over safely to Bathurst Kerr on the platform at Interlaken.

Those two Englishmen who shook hands on that platform were right worthy of their race. Kerr had been told by cable that Mrs. Vinton would sail at once and he had waited for her. Practically by force he had brought the German doctor from Interlaken out to Engstlen Alp and kept him there. By an odd chance one of the guests at the little hotel was Miss Civilese Springer, of Dayton, O., U. S. A., a graduate of the Training School for Nurses at the University of Chicago. Haussmann, of Geneva, had been telegraphed for and had arrived the day before. He was to stay until the necessity of an operation was decided definitely one way or the other, for there was an abscess on the brain and meningitis. Kerr detailed all this to Marcella between Interlaken and Engstlen, and also how he had happened to see the fall, and with his servant had carried the stranger on a litter made of a Loden mantle, slung between two alpenstocks from the foot of the glacier, whither the lifeless body had rolled, to the inn.

It was this same Bathurst Kerr who put his huge arm about her when she stood at the foot of a wooden

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bed and looked down at a bandage-swathed, unrecognizable thing that gibbered and shrieked at the sight of her. He wanted to lead her away after that, but she sent him away instead, and the nurse, too, and, alone, she knelt down by that bed and took the poor, battered, senseless thing in her arms.

VI

MISS CIVILESE SPRINGER is a duly graduated nurse, but at Engstlen Alp she was without the paraphernalia of her profession. She had no uniforms, no glasses, no sponges; she did not have even a thermometer at first, but had to order one from Geneva. Among the things she thus lacked were charts, and she tried to fill their place by a diary. Miss Springer is by no means an instinctive diarist, but, nevertheless, a good many matters are in that diary that would certainly not find a place on an official chart.

She has showed me this diary. It is very interesting, and at times very embarrassing, too. On the whole, it is the most personal document I have ever inspired. It is interesting to read what the great Haussmann thought of me and did to me. He looks like a fat, black-bearded Russian, the diary says. And he thought very badly of me, indeed. On the night of his arrival, which was the second before the night of Marcella's, he

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wouldn't have anything to do with me at all. The next day he thought a little better of it. Then Marcella came. The diary reads here: "And now the wife has come!" with a huge exclamation point. Then Haussmann operated. Miss Springer was greatly interested apparently in seeing the maître in action. "What luck!" says the diary. "It was wonderful," she writes later; "Cushing cannot be more wonderful." Who is Cushing? I was ashamed to display my ignorance to Miss Springer. When the great man went away he left an assistant, Doctor Lebon. She describes him as dirty. "A dirty Frenchman," the diary reads. There was also a nurse, Sœur Agathe. Miss Springer has a very high standard of personal cleanliness, for Sister Agathe also was "dirty." All this was intensely interesting to him who had felt it all and known nothing about it. This was the way the world wagged without the help of his consciousness.

But the most interesting entry was that which described a little lapse into semiconsciousness of the patient in the fourth week of his illness. The patient suddenly gave unmistakable evidences of consciousness. He even made a sign that he was thirsty. "His wife," the record says, "who was seated at the bedside, bent

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over him, spoke to him, called his name. He looked at her intently for several moments. Then, without recognition, he closed his eyes and apparently slept. Later, delirium."

It was very curious. When I read that I remembered the occurrence perfectly. I had never forgot it. Only I had never before known that the gaunt, white, hollow-eyed woman standing there was Marcella.

The second return was very different. I had lain for hours, forever, it seemed to me, conscious of a beam above my head. (The rooms at the Engstlen are unpapered.) Suddenly the beam enlarged into a roof, the roof into a house, into the world, into life. That was the way I came back.

Curiously, my mind instantly returned to the minute when I stood at the mantel in Mrs. Axson's apartment and she told me to get my hat and take a walk. Indeed, it was several days before I recovered the lost interval, and weeks before I could arrange its proper sequence. So, when I awoke in the far-away Swiss inn, I was mentally still standing in Mrs. Axson's apartment in New York. In this sense my remark was coherent enough. The diary records it triumphantly, though very badly spelled. I had intended, I suppose,

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to say it to Lilly Axson over a liqueur glass after dinner, when it would have sounded possibly cynical and clever. Instead, on what was pretty near to my death-bed, I spat it out, when it sounded silly and vulgar as it really was, and I was ashamed when I read it and hope to forget it. So much for that sort of flippancy.

But I was not allowed to make any such headlong plunge into consciousness. On the contrary, no sooner had I poked my head above the "waters of oblivion" than Doctor Lebon ducked it under again with opiates. I remember on the first occasion a strange-looking woman in white giving me a drink and nothing more. Lebon and I played, according to the "chart," this little game for several days, each emergence on my part becoming a little longer, and each ducking on his part a little less complete. Then, too, I recollect deliberately playing into my opponent's hands. I often lay for hours conscious of my position in a vague, dreamlike way, without giving a sign or making any effort to complete the consciousness. Then some movement would betray me, and under I had to go again. They were really very delightful, those stolen moments. I viewed the world as a soul detached from its body,

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an intelligence, dim and uncertain, of course, but in compensation, quite relieved of all responsibility, even the responsibility of continuing to exist. I had only one anxiety then—the dread of completing the consciousness. I suppose I remembered nothing particularly alluring in this world that was going on about me, and as from the first moment of my consciousness, they had banished Marcella, or rather she had banished herself, I saw nothing to indicate that it had changed during my absence. I lay, looking at the strange woman at my bedside or at the ceiling or out of the windows at the mountains, quite realizing who I was and where I was, and rapidly learning how the combination had come about, but without the least curiosity in the matter; rather, in fact, with a strong repugnance for such information. So, for a week, I dwelt in Nirvana, and then abruptly one morning I dropped into Switzerland.

It was a very bright day out-of-doors, and one of the windows was open. From very far off came the sound of cow-bells. A white-clothed man was standing at the foot of my bed and a white-clothed woman was bending over me from the side of it. The man was short and bald, with a very black mustache. The

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woman had coarse dark hair, too, but was tall and thin and wore a rimless pince-nez, guarded by a thin gold chain fastened around the ear.

"Mr. Vinton," said the woman. And I knew I was caught at last.

"Yes," I said, "I am Mr. Vinton," and the thin, shaky voice scared me.

"Of course," said the woman, bending still lower and arranging the covers about my throat. "And you feel all right this morning, don't you?"

"What happened?" I asked.

She glanced at the man before she replied. "You fell," she explained.

"When?"

Again she glanced at him. "About a week ago, but if you ask any more questions you will have to go to sleep again."

I knew about how much truth there was in her answer, but persisted no further.

"Now, to-day," she went on, "you may lie here without going to sleep, but you mustn't ask any questions, and you must not move. If you do either you will have to go to sleep again." She had the patronizing air of a mother toward a child.

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"Do you mind telling me what place this is?" I asked.

She told me. Then, with a finger on her lips, sat down beside me and took up a book. The man in white tiptoed softly out of the room. They were Doctor Lebon and Miss Civilese Springer, of Dayton, O.

For two days I had nothing better than to watch Miss Springer read a book and try to guess what the book was about from the expression of her face. It was a singularly unexpressive face, too—dark and thin and with a noticeable mustache. Occasionally Sœur Agathe took her place. The nun was short and stout and, instead of reading, slept placidly with her hands crossed on her stomach. On the whole, the time passed slowly.

"Now, this morning," said Miss Springer on the morning of the third day, "you may talk for a little while."

"Thanks," I replied.

"But not to me," she added archly.

I was grateful but quite unaware of what she meant.

"Not to me; to some one ever so much nicer than me."

Apparently, she thought my intellect permanently impaired. While she talked she was making purpose-

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less dabs at my hair and the furniture and the bed-clothes. Finally, with a finger on her lips and an exceedingly arch smile, she disappeared.

It was a brilliant day. Out of the windows I could see the snow in the sunlight and the room shone with the dazzling reflection. For the first time then I felt a faint stir of joy in the return to life. But the sensation went no further. Life might be pleasant, but it was not as yet interesting.

So when I heard a door open softly behind me, a footstep in the room, I did not turn. The sunlight outside was pleasant and pretty. Then I heard a sound —half a sob, half my name. I turned and saw her. She was standing just inside the room, the sunlight about her feet, her face in the shadow. How worn it was! The almost boyish air of diffidence, that is so wholly hers seemed strange with such a care-worn woman.

“Marcella,” I whispered.

She did not answer.

“When did you come?”

“A long time ago.”

Then I gasped. The astounding nature of the thing touched me at last. “Who sent for you?”

“Nobody. I just came,” she answered.

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"You just came—by yourself? Why?"

"Why?" she repeated. She came a step nearer, almost angrily. Then she stopped with a sob. "So that if you didn't get well I could go up on that mountain and jump off after you."

"Somebody," I said, "has been telling you lies."

"Nobody has told me anything. Nobody knows anything—except me, but I know it all."

"Marcella," I began, "there's nothing to know. I fell, if that's what you mean. I swear I fell. It was awfully good of you to come—far more."

But when I said that she dropped to her knees and hid her face in her hands, sobbing.

I was bandaged like a mummy. I could only lift one arm, and that very little, but I somehow raised my shoulders from the pillows, and I called to her. She came with a cry of warning. "You mustn't move. You mustn't."

The move was a little bit too much. It made me giddy. Then, gently, I was lowered by her arms to the pillows again.

She held me so, absolutely helpless, and her face was hidden by my shoulder. I could only touch her hair with my fingers.

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"Don't send me away," she whispered.

And lying there, faint and half blind, feeling her arms again about me, after the long grief and pain, I had no strength of any kind, and taking advantage of my own weakness I whispered back: "Don't leave me."

VII

BY a charming convention happiness is recognized as dwelling in valleys, and certainly if I were an Olympian with a quantity of human happiness to dispose of I should hide it in just some such valley as this of the Engstlen Alp. It is very small and very green with the bluest water in the world, by the banks of which our weather-stained dwelling sits as inconspicuously as possible, and the whole is set like a jewel, like two jewels, green and blue among the snow-crowned cliffs. It is an unreally beautiful place altogether, and a most unreal situation has developed itself within it—a situation that smacks of opera bouffe—and yet is an incontestable reality. I cannot accept it, and yet I would not alter it for the gift of the stars. It is, and it isn't. I will, and I won't. Tweedledum and tweedledee. In short—do what I can, I can make neither head nor tail of it.

Marcella says I have no business trying; that my only

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affair is to get well. Perhaps she is right, and I endeavor to follow her council but cannot quite. The getting well is simple enough and is proceeding at a very satisfactory rate to every one; to mine host and hostess, for example, who assure me of the fact every morning; and to the servants, and to the few guests who still remain and also assure me of their satisfaction whenever we meet. But the situation! That does not proceed at all, but sticks impregnably in the same place. What is going to happen to that, only an all-wise Providence and Marcella can say. We are doing very well under the circumstances, but the circumstances are rather peculiar.

The first stage of my recovery was marked by the departure of Doctor Lebon and Sister Agathe. They went away together. Between them they had probably saved my life, but I saw them go with unmixed satisfaction. Before leaving Lebon gave me two pieces of excellent advice—never while I lived to go in a hot sun without a handkerchief in my hat and never during the same period to take any of Miss Civilese Springer's medicines. Miss Springer remained behind and, it seemed, was inclined to certain drugs which French science holds in contempt.

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To Miss Springer also I largely owe my present existence; nevertheless, she was a nuisance. To begin with, Marcella disliked her; and, besides, she held prominent religious views. I forgot their nature; it was their intensity I found unpleasant. She was a Buddhist or something of the sort, and I like Christians about me when I am not feeling well. Buddhism and polo and terrapin are the recreations of health. Still her departure was not as simple a matter as was that of the other two, and this was because of the before-mentioned situation.

At the time there were, unquestionably, a great many things which I was obliged to say to Marcella, and a similar number of things which she was obliged to say to me. Yet as day followed day in this lovely little valley with the "pot of blue ink" in the middle of it and snowy summits all about it, we never said them. We came very close at times, but always between our last words and the actual beginning intervened a silence, a queer eerie silence that was the end of it. We came up to the very edge of that silence which hung like a gulf between us and the highly important conversations and there we stopped. Time and again we got that far, but we never got any further. Perhaps

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it was because the valley was so lovely, the lake so blue in it, the snow-capped peaks so exquisite a frame for it, the days so calmly pure, life so full of peace and content and hope that we hated to disturb so much loveliness by any talk of hideous and half-forgotten things. They were all ultramontane things, anyway; and to me at Engstlen Alp what is ultramontane is practically beyond my imagination, too. Occasionally letters come and Marcella reads me bits of them, but I never listen very long.

So we drifted on in the rudderless boat of content, occasionally touching a sand-bar of silence but never sticking very long, until Miss Springer's assistance was palpably superfluous. It was considered so when I could put on my trousers unassisted. Before that I felt a certain moral need of Miss Springer's presence in the hotel; but when I stood erect, a presentably clothed man, made so by my own efforts, I felt that Miss Springer's day was done. I told her so. She agreed with me. The actual leave-taking alone remained. But it was just here that the weakness of Marcella's and my position became apparent.

Then I recognized that I must to a certain degree break through one of those queer silences. I do not

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know that I should ever have had courage for the plunge had it not been for Miss Springer's salary. Theretofore all such matters had been in the care of Marcella, but now that I could make my toilet, it was manifest that I could sign my checks. So, sitting up in bed, on the night before Miss Springer's departure I wrote out a check. A sense of complete masculinity pervaded my soul as I flourished the signature. A man who can put on his own trousers and sign a check can do anything. I took a deep breath and sat erect.

"My dear Marcella," I began.

"Are you writing me a letter?" asked Marcella. She was drying the check over a candle and had her back to me.

"No. I am talking to you."

"Well, what is it?" She turned and began to blow on the check instead. Thus, face to face, my courage fled. I grasped at it desperately.

"Don't you realize that we are not married?" I cried.

She looked at me and giggled. "Have you just thought of that?" she asked.

"Have you ever thought of it?" I asked.

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"I thought of it the very first minute I came in this house."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. I didn't have to. Of course, every one thought we were."

"That," I answered, "doesn't alter the fact that we are not."

"Oh, doesn't it?" said Marcella. "Then what are you going to do?"

"We must get married."

She put down the check and sat down on my bed. "Now listen, Peter. Let me explain and then go to sleep, for you mustn't get excited. In the first place we can't get married here, because if we did naturally everybody would know we hadn't been before. I couldn't face 'em then to save my life. It would be terrible. Think of it. They might turn me out. I don't know what they might not do. Well, in the second place, you can't go away to get married anywhere else. It would probably kill you to try. Now, there isn't any third course. So we can't do anything except go on as we are. Now, if I put out the light will you try to go to sleep?"

"Just a moment," I put in. "There is a third course.

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We can tell Miss Springer and make her stay. 'Chaperon,' you see."

Marcella hesitated. Then she blushed. "Oh, Peter!" she said, "I couldn't."

And for my part I don't see very well how she could. So there the matter rested, and the next morning Miss Springer left us. From my chair I saw her finally vanish beyond the hills. There, I thought, goes our last link with respectability. I looked at Marcella. She was crocheting.

It is true that the situation is largely of her making.

When I had been identified at the hotel as Mr. Vinton and it was announced that Mrs. Vinton was coming, the implication was natural. The situation demanded a female relation of some sort, preferably a wife. Thus, when Marcella arrived the situation might be said to have been created; it only remained for her to step into it. This she did, and in this way, though she may not have created it, at any rate she completed it. Therefore her nonchalance when face to face with it amazes me. It makes me quake with apprehension of the day when the guidance of this world will be put into the hands of her sex.

Discussion of any sort is useless in the circumstances.

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Thus we are sitting here on the porch, looking over the valley. We are waiting for the sounds of the cattle-bells as they are driven down for the night. Marcella has a sewing-basket, I a writing-pad, a pack of cards, a book—any of the consolations of convalescence. She glances up from her work and catches me looking at her.

"What are you thinking of?" asks she.

"I was wondering how I ever got you back."

"Don't you know?"

I shook my head.

She bent lower over her sewing. "Neither do I," she answered. "Only when Courty showed me the cable it was like somebody had tied a string around me and was pulling."

"It was a pretty long string," I suggested.

"It was pretty strong, too," she said.

"What was it made of, Marcella?"

Marcella dropped her sewing, and looked up at the cows. "Oh!" she said slowly, "it was the same old string."

Undoubtedly it was, as she said, a pretty strong string. I thought of how many people had taken a hack at it; how I had gnawed at it, and she too, and the Supreme Bench.

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Marcella interrupted my reminiscences. "Pierre," she said, "there can't be real divorce. There's release, but there isn't any such thing as divorce."

"Marcella," I answered, "don't let's talk about such disagreeable subjects."

And that is the nearest we have ever come to that tremendous conversation which should certainly have taken place between us.

Meanwhile our condition causes, I am led to believe, some uneasiness to the ultramontanes. Brown's letters arrive by every post. At first they were reticent. Lately they have become the trumpet-calls of orthodoxy. Finally, in desperation, he writes: "You see, Old Top, it's all right for you and for me and for everybody that has any sense, but if it were to get out it would be all-fired bad for Business." I made Marcella read that twice. In that sentence I read the birth announcement of a Courtland Brown 2d, whom as yet I have never seen: a self-respecting young American, with his weather-eye on "business." Accompanying this was a P. S.: "Habliston begs pardon, but may he send his respects to Miss Marcella?" Whereat Marcella almost cries.

Mrs. Axson is allied with Brown. She has taken a

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house at Auteuil for the autumn, and feels sure that I would convalesce more quickly and surely there than here. Marcella writes that I shall not stir until Haussmann gives the word. She added: "Anyhow we are in no condition to pay visits." Whereupon Mrs. Axson must be told everything, and in return we get a telegram:

"Pour l'amour de Mike, soyez raisonnable.

"LILLY."

These are things we hear. What is being said, whispered, thought, imagined, that we do not hear, we sometimes guess at—sometimes, not frequently. At such times Marcella sighs patiently and says I am to blame for falling in such an inaccessible place. I have no fault to find with the place. It is vastly the pleasantest place I have dwelt in for many years, and I could be quite content to dwell here forever, while the heathen rage beyond the mountains. About this rude little settlement in the lonely, beautiful valley we live by the sun, and when that leaves us in the evening we linger out here on the porch until the high pasturing cattle come tinkling down from the heights and

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are housed for the night. Then, leaning on her arm, I am led within. Such are the faces of the uncounted days. Of what queer stuff does Happiness cut its clothes!

Once, in the night, I woke suddenly from a dream of days that are past and dead now, but the spell of the dream was strong upon me. It was only the touch of another's hand as it lay in mine while she slept that brought back the present. Through the uncurtained window a single star was shining cold and pale through the moonlight above a snow-capped peak. Had I touched coarsely or rudely the divine gift of Love that placed that hand so trustingly in mine, or had I only stripped it of the convenient wrappings of custom and laid bare the living miracle within?

The touch of her hand, as she stirred in her dream, and I knew and slept in peace.



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